Burn Your Wings
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Collections:
Best of Quirk! Izuku, Reading is one form of escape. Running for your life is another., Tododeku Fic Recommendation, Best of My Hero Academia, Fine Fanfic, Boku No Hero Academia Stories, Bnha fics that keep me from sleeping, I Sorted Through Shit And Found Gold, BNHA Fanfic W(Rec)ks!, Works Loved By Luna04, Anodyne fics, Genius bnha fanfics, Brilliant Recs - Reread at any time,

Favorite Deku-Centric Fics, Just sum of ma fav broccoli boi fic, Just sum of ma fav tododeku fic, why im sleep deprived 💙✨, 3am Fics Stealing My Sleep, Bnha Bookclub Discord Recs, These are the best written fanfics I've ever read, Mixed_Fics, fanfics i ranted to my mom about but didn't have the heart to tell her they were fanfics, Best Fics From Across The Multiverse, Top bnha fics ✨, 僕のヒーローアカデミア - (読み返す [よみかえす]), its-yaboijojo Read Later/Favorites, Got 99 problems but these ain't one, amazing fanfics to read over and over again, All-time BNHA Favourites, The Collection From the Clouds, Fanfics I'd eat again at 3 am and already have, BNHA BEST CHAPTER FICS TO EVER GRACE THE INTERNET, hydrg3n's tddk recs !, BNHA Canon Rewrites/Rehashes- with a twist!, ⭐ Little Red's BNHA Library ⭐, Bnha fics that carved out a place in my brain, Best of the best fanfics, Absolute Favorites, Fanfiction Masterpieces, Long_and_Loved_BNHA_fanfics, Already Read, Stories That Deserve More, Rain Recs, Complete fics I want to read (Nightowls), TodoDeku Heaven, Rhynes MHA favs, Phoenix's Re-read List, mars's bnha fanfiction library, So Much Talent on AO3, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, quarter's BNHA shelf, MHA works that make me happy this site exists, Finished golden ones, Pthaloteal, Things To Read At School, Fav MHA long fic recs, Owie It Hurts, BNHA Treasure Box, Fics that soothe my soul at 4am, Bnha (rheos), My hero academia, Favs mesmo, 🧁TDIZ reads, My Favourite Fanfics, 🍀GOAT FICS feat: My Hero Izuku🍀, Fics_I_dream_about_every_night, Once Again Midoriya Izuku Is Catnip To Trouble, Midoriya Izuku Has A Quirk And The Unexpected Is Expected, bnha fics⭐, Finished Favs, elian's favorites <3, Vee's Desert Island TodoDeku Fics, Vee's God Tier Fics, Green Bean & Co, My morning bnha tea, soul healing comes from fanfiction, 1Ids a Bitter's Life Sweetener, Fics That I Like ⭐, fanfics that I recommended to my friends, Shit! I need to read!, Finished Fics (bnha), jrmuffin's favorites, Favoritos (completos y en proceso) My hero Academia, My Favorite BNHA Fics, A Picky Vest's Favorites, TodoDeku for my dark soul, Awesomeness, My Hero Academia Fics To Cleanse Your Soul ♨, the holy grail of fanfiction, Polished Gems, 💮 Himeno's Favorites 💮, Fics I've Read That Are Longer Than Pride and Predjudice, Izuku has the best quirks and is probably traumatized, my hero academia: a medley, Aliremha, Wolfis MyHeroAcademia Library, Good reads I don't know where to keep, Favorites BNHA⭐, 🌳 Izuku and his emotional support dads, Bnha fics that give me a reason to live™ <3, Worth It BNHA Fanfics Reading List - Completed, BNHA Fics that cured my cancer, Martian's Delights, stuff ive finished reading 🧢🧢, books that make me go wowow, Road to Nowhere Discord Recs, My Favorites:

Complete Edition, Works So Good Id Physically Buy the Hard Cover Version in Stores, ✧ anime fanfics ✧, From the Vault, My Favourite BNHA Longfics, 👌 good shit, Writeass's favorite fics, Mage735's reading list, International Fanworks Day 2022 - Classic Fic Recs, BNHA Library, BEST BOI IZUKU_top BNHA works, ✧✧ i can not stop rereading!! ✧✧, oml these fics are bloody amazing, My Hero Academia, vespertine, Personal_Preferences, my heart is here, mha fanfic that waters my crops, longfics that butter my bread, 10/10 would re-read bnha, Masterpieces Forged in Fandom, broccoli shit finished, Flashfreeze Recs, The Reading List, The Eternal Crack Server Fic Rec Collection, Goodsoup1543, my tab dump, Niks, Best of MHA, Whole Ass Novels, A badass izuku with 99 issues (seriously is a rabbit with a knife)💙, I live for Deku (and Class 1-A), My daddy issues and Dadzawa, Boku no Hero Academia Fanfics, BNHA - My favorite fanfics, will these fics make or break me lets find out, AnoditeOmniaAbuzz, found family, The Midoriya Izuku Archive, Discord Fics From Network Error, The 1412's Library of Good Reads, best reads uwu, puu, Beautifully written pieces of art, Bnha fanfic who has my heart, 📚 Fanfic Forum Discord Recs, Book bindings I want in my house, mha fics that are my will to live, the good good, Rivers Favs, Pomarac's All Time Faves < 3, BNHAHappyFunFics, 🍉Melon's heart is held hostage by these wonderful fics🍉, I am in absolute ✧AWE✧ ajfkshfkd, bnha, BEST MHA FICS TO EVER BE MADE 🧢, quetegustandebnh, BNHA/MHA, A Wandering Caretaker's Shrine, fics that live up to mads' impossible standards, MGA, Mha tododeku without bakubitch, 💙 Favorite BNHA Works ⚡, Like A Favorite Sweater, FanFiction Hangover[This deserve to be worshiped and I'll rec these for the rest of my life!), Seul's Favorite BNHA Fics, Elvie's favourites, Selected Best Reads, AO3 Amazing, CompletedFicsToRead, Izuku Midoriya (because I like him and he deserves more), best completed works for my unemployed ass, v3n0n4t's bookshelf, Gryffs fics II, Moss's favorites, Bnha masterpieces to read all the time, All Mighty Hero Selections

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by oWhiteKiwibird

Summary

Izuku inherited his parents' quirks, but he swore he'd never use his fire.

He knows first hand how—bright, burning, scorching, painful, terrifying, destructive—it is, after all, and Izuku promised (promised his crying mother, promised his burning self, promised the laughing memory of his father) that he'd become a hero who stops that kind of despair.

Even if he has to burn his own wings to do so.

But when someone with the exact same problems, fears, and pain shows up... Izuku can't help but try to heal them. And in doing so, he himself may be healed too.

Midoriya Izuku: Origin

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind.

Little Izuku doesn't know what that means yet, but he does know that his father acts differently when he's at home and when he's outside. He watches silently as his father smiles and laughs with other people on the few occasions he sees his father in public and cowers under Hisashi's hard sneer and rough hand within the confines of their home.

Being a bad person is not the same thing as being a villain.

Hisashi is not a villain (yet), but he is a bad person.

Like all children, the only world Izuku knows is his own. He thinks his world is absolute, and so Izuku doesn't know that it's wrong. He just knows that it is. It always has been—and always will be—this way, he thinks.

But the first time his father beats his mother, Izuku's world snaps.

Hisashi had never been gentle, either with Izuku or Inko, in the privacy of their home. But he hadn't been outright violent, either.

That is, until he *became* violent.

One day Hisashi came home drunk, and it was only—ha, *only*—a backhanded slap to Inko's face then. But after that one time, it became a common occurrence. Then it got worse. He started really beating her. Then, he began to beat her even when he wasn't drunk.

Inko has started locking Izuku away in the broom cupboard whenever it was time for Hisashi to come back home, fearful of what the man might do to their helpless son. And Izuku does feel helpless. He curls into himself sobbing silently as all he can do is listen to the furious panting and swearing of his father, the muffled cries of his mother, and the merciless sound of flesh pounding on flesh.

He scrabbles at the door until his fingertips are bleeding, but he is never able to get out until his father wanders away to sleep in the

bedroom and his mother—tired and broken and bruised and bloody—is finally able to pick herself off the floor and deems it safe enough to retrieve him.

But one day, Hisashi comes home sooner than expected.

Inko panics. She drags and shoves Izuku inside the broom cupboard, but in her haste doesn't have time to lock it. Hisashi, not knowing and perhaps not even caring, just falls into habit and starts beating her.

But Izuku *does* know, and *does* care, so he scrabbles at the door with raw fingertips, and this time, it actually opens.

Izuku's small body comes tumbling out into the living room. Both his parents turn to him, Inko's bruised face falling in horror and Hisashi's features twisting into a sneer.

"What's this?" he asks, but soon turns away from Izuku's trembling body with a scoff. "Whatever. Run along, boy, I don't have time to deal with you right now."

Inko's defeated body sags with relief, but Izuku's freezes with despair.

Hisashi is approaching Inko again, not even caring that Izuku is there.

If there's one thing that's greater than Izuku's fear of his father, it's his fear *for* his mother.

But Izuku knows that he can't do anything to stop his father. Hisashi is the absolute ruler of their household, he's too big and too strong, and is hell-bent on beating his mother again.

Izuku can't stop his father. He can't save his mother.

So Izuku does the only thing he can.

He steps between them.

"Wha, what...? No, Izuku, darling, don't, you can't, you... listen to what your father said and *run* —"

Inko reaches for her son feebly, but her legs have stopped working either from being strained or stressed. Already dark spots are invading her vision, and she can barely keep her eyes on the small, shaking back of her son as he stands between herself and Hisashi.

Hisashi sneers, licks of flame flickering menacingly at the corners of

his mouth.

“You *dare* disobey me, boy?”

Izuku trembles, but stands his ground.

Hisashi slaps him.

Izuku’s face whips to the side, his small body swaying with the force of the blow. And yet, he still stays between his parents.

This time, Hisashi punches him.

Izuku falls to the ground. But he gets back up before Hisashi can take another step towards Inko.

Hisashi kicks him. Throws him. Stomps him. Breathes fire on him. But Izuku keeps getting up. Again and again and again, more bruised and bloody and tearful every single time, but he still gets up and stands between Hisashi and Inko.

Eventually, Hisashi seems to have blown off enough steam that he wanders towards the bedroom without going back to Inko, who seems to have fainted at some point.

Izuku stands there a moment more, panting and crying silently, adrenaline pumping through his veins, bruises and cuts and burns riddling his body.

But his mother is mercifully unharmed.

And for a moment, Izuku is *exhilarated.* He wasn’t able to stop his father, or completely save his mother, but at least he has been able to protect her from more harm. At this moment, he feels taller than a skyscraper, stronger than All Might. He feels like a hero.

Inko awakes, and Izuku smiles at her.

“It’s okay, Mom,” he whispers, unknowingly smiling through the blood on his teeth. *“I am here.* I protected you.”

But when Inko takes a look at her battered and bloody son, she breaks down sobbing. It’s a testament to just how much Hisashi has them under his control that even half hysterical and broken as she is, she still chokes and muffles her cries so as not to disturb the sleeping man.

“I’m sorry, Izuku,” she whispers through her sobs, not daring to hug

her son least she worsens his numerous wounds. “I am *so sorry,* Izuku.”

And as Izuku looks down at his mother, who is curled up in front of him on the floor in a cruel parody of a dogeza, his adrenaline rush and exhilaration comes crashing down and he thinks *no Mom, that’s not what I wanted you to say. What I wanted you to say was…*

Before he can finish that thought, Izuku blacks out.

*

Izuku learns how to pick locks with bobby pins and paper clips.

The next time Inko locks him in the broom cupboard, he frantically fumbles in the dark until the lock clicks and he comes tumbling out once more.

He finds Hisashi standing over Inko with a bloodied fist.

He steps between them.

*

It happens again. And again. And again.

Inko learns that locking Izuku up is no use anymore and stops trying.

All she does is cry.

*

A few more times, and Hisashi doesn’t even bother going for Inko anymore. He starts coming straight for Izuku.

It hurts. It hurts it hurts it hurts, and Inko’s muffled sobbing hurts

even more. But even through the blinding pain and flames, Izuku bares his teeth in a twisted parody of a smile. Because Hisashi beating *him* means that he isn't beating Izuku's mother.

Izuku learns that day that defeat can taste like victory.

*

Most people manifest their quirk before the age of four.

Izuku's fourth birthday comes and goes without him showing even a hint of a quirk, and a worried Inko takes the opportunity when Hisashi is out for the day to quickly shuttle Izuku to the hospital.

"He doesn't have the second joint in his toe that would make him quirkless," the doctor says, pointing at his x-ray. "It may be that young Midoriya does indeed have a quirk, but he just hasn't activated it yet. Is there anything that might be pressuring him, or oppressing him?"

Inko looks at the doctor wildly, because she doesn't know where to even *start.* Then she looks down at her young son, who's looking up at her with wide bright eyes, who's never known what it's like *not* to be oppressed that he doesn't even know he *is* being oppressed.

A sob threatens to break out, but Inko stifles it with practiced ease.

She takes her son's hand, and they leave wordlessly.

Later, when they've almost reached home, Izuku quietly whispers.

"I hope I get your quirk," he says softly. "I hope I get your quirk, and not... not the one that hurt you so much." That hurt *him* so much, he doesn't say. Izuku looks up at Inko, and his bright green eyes are full of sincerity. "I want to protect you. I want to be a hero."

And at that, not even Inko can keep in the tears.

*

But life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind.

Hisashi had come home while the two of them were out, and he is *furious* at their absence.

"*What* do you think you're doing?" he hisses, flames rolling out of his mouth with his every breath. "You think you can just run around as you please? You *dare* defy me?!"

This time he isn't just generally taking out his violent nature. No, he's focused and angry at them. At Inko, to be exact.

For the first time in months, Hisashi lunges not for Izuku, but Inko.

"No!" Izuku yells, throwing himself in front of a wide-eyed and frozen Inko. His back is to Hisashi, trying to shield his mother from the flames that flicker from the man's furious breath. He's desperate and scared and frantic, and for a wild moment, he thinks he won't be enough. Izuku *pushes* with all he has, trying to get his mother out of the literal line of fire.

Something *bursts out* from within him, and Hisashi lets out a shocked sound. Izuku opens the eyes that he hadn't noticed he'd closed to find Inko staring at him with something akin to horror. Her wide eyes clearly reflect back Izuku's reflection, and he finds that there's an almost halo of flames at his back.

Izuku opens his mouth to assure her that it doesn't hurt, but Inko beats him to it.

She *screams.*

The sharp, shrill sound penetrates Izuku's heart and freezes his blood. He recoils, because she's screaming at the sight of *him,* and *his* fire, and *he never wanted to hurt her, he only wanted to protect her, why, why why why why—*

At that moment, the flames that had been burning harmlessly at his back turn against him. And now it *does* hurt, and Izuku's screams joins Inko's as his flesh is burned by his own quirk.

Their sick harmony of screaming is cut short when Hisashi harshly slaps each of them in turn. Inko crumples to the ground, either from the force of the blow or from shock. But by now Izuku is too used to pain for the bliss of unconsciousness to take him at just one blow, and even with his back and shoulders a mess of pain, pain, *pain pain pain*

pain he's still alert enough to raise his trembling head and look up at Hisashi's mad, mad grin.

"Well, lookie here," the man laughs harshly, flames licking at his lips. "What have we got here, boy, hm? You're not breathing it out like I do, but I'll be damned if that's not a fire quirk. *My* fire quirk."

Hisashi leans down to Izuku, his black curly hair brushing against the child's forehead and his black, black eyes boring into his very soul. Then he breathes the words that will haunt Izuku for life, that burn themselves onto his beating heart, that plague his every hopes and dreams:

"Like father, like son."

*

When Inko wakes up again, she's lying down with a blanket pulled over her, Hisashi nowhere in sight.

"I'm sorry, Mom," a quiet voice calls out, and Inko whips her head around.

Izuku is standing a few feet away from the foot of her blanket, like he's unsure of whether he's allowed to come near her. His head is hanging, his hands are clasped in front of him, his shirt is torn and kept together by awkwardly looped bandages, and he *reeks* of the familiar smell of burn cream.

A sob catches in Inko's throat.

"No, darling. *I'm* sorry. I'm so, *so* sorry, Izuku."

Izuku opens his mouth like he wants to say something, then closes it. Inko waits, but her son says nothing so she opens her arms wordlessly, not trusting herself to be able to form any more words. He steps closer to her, shoulders sagging in relief, and Inko holds her son around his waist, careful of the loose bandages and burn cream on his upper back.

After a moment, Izuku slowly raises his arms to cradle her head. She's not sure if the slow movements are because of the pain in his back, or

because he's hesitating from the uncertainty that she might reject him since she's already screamed at him.

The vulnerability in his trembling body breaks her heart all over again.

Inko wants to apologize again. She wants to tell him that she's sorry that she freaked out, that it's not his fault, that she's sorry she birthed him like this, that she's sorry he feels like he has to protect her and not the other way around—

All that makes out of her mouth, though, is a broken sob.

*

Being a bad person is not the same thing as being a villain.

Hisashi had been a bad person, a bad father and a bad man, but he hadn't been an outright, public villain that got heroes chasing after him.

But Hisashi used to not be violent, and then he *became* violent. Just like that, this changes too, and not too long after Izuku realizes his quirk a new villain makes himself known to the world.

Perhaps seeing Izuku with his quirk had changed something in Hisashi. Perhaps he just got bored of keeping his violent nature hidden in the confines of their small home. Izuku doesn't know (and doesn't ever want to understand) why, and for the longest time he doesn't even know *what.* All he knows is that Hisashi comes back home late more often, smelling of smoke and ashes and wearing a satisfied grin that usually only comes after he'd de-stressed with a thorough beating session with Izuku. (*As if he'd already taken out his anger on someone else,* Izuku later thinks back in sick realization.)

Months pass before Izuku and Inko clue into the fact that Hisashi has become a villain. And they don't even learn it from the man himself. They are too afraid of him to ask anything, and he thinks so little of them to actually tell them anything, after all.

It happens like this.

Hisashi hasn’t come home in three days, and the bruises Izuku got from his last beating are slowly starting to fade away. But neither he or Inko dare hope their luck will last and are waiting with baited breath, tiptoeing on thin ice.

But then they see the news about a fire-breathing villain being caught by some hero. They see the blurry picture of a man with curly black hair, snapping black eyes and flames spilling out of his mouth, cuffed and led by the police. They both see, they both recognize, and for a long, long time, all they can do is stare at the screen.

*

It's anticlimactic.

It almost doesn't feel real.

Inko and Izuku still jump whenever heavy footsteps approach their front door even if it turns out to only be the mailman, still have a habit of talking softly even though there's no one in the house that will beat them for being loud, and still have a light—if any phobia can be called *light*—pyrophobia.

Wounds don't heal easily, after all, and scars take even longer to fade.

But Izuku will take it. Even if they're jittery and jumpy and nervous, it's worlds better than being bruised and bloody.

It's worlds better than having to watch someone else become bruised and bloody.

*

The hero that caught Hisashi is not well known. Their name isn’t even mentioned in any of the press. But Izuku digs until he finds them, then he finds everything he can about them. The information a five-year-old can dig up is admittedly little, not to mention that there isn’t much about the hero in the first place, but the heart of a determined boy isn’t easily put down.

Izuku finds all he can about this hero. He learns their name. He learns that they've just recently made their formal debut. He finds and prints out a blurry picture of the hero that looks like it's from a paused footage of a security camera.

He carefully tacks it on his wall, right next to his favourite poster of All Might.

*

They move.

With Hisashi unceremoniously leaving and their sole source of income abruptly cut off, Inko has to work and leave Izuku alone. But still, even struggling to make ends meet, they move. Neither of them has any love for the place where Hisashi taints their memories like bloodstains on a wall.

So they move to a smaller apartment in a different town.

There, Izuku meets Bakugo Katsuki.

Izuku sees him standing over a crying child in the playground, laughing with youthful cruelty.

And Izuku knows that Bakugo isn't Hisashi, that this child isn't Inko. But he looks at the blasts firing in Bakugo's hands, at the tears on the child's face, and does the only thing he knows to in this situation.

He steps between them.

*

"You playing at hero, Deku? You don't even have a quirk!"

"I have a quirk."

"Yeah? Then show it!"

Izuku doesn't.

Because he really, really wishes he *didn't* have this quirk.

*

Izuku doesn't want anything to do with his quirk that so obviously came from his father, that's so destructive and painful, that *made his mother scream,* but he still inadvertently comes to know some facts about it. Quirks are as much a part of you as your limbs are, so accidental bursts of flame erupt from time to time until Izuku learns to keep a tight lid on it. In doing so, though, he learns more about his quirk.

Hisashi had commented on how Izuku's fire quirk was different than his own, and it's true. Hisashi had breathed fire only from his mouth, but Izuku can emit it from any part of his body, though he can still breath it out like a dragon. (*Like his father,* he resolutely *doesn't* think.) It feels less like making fire and more like *pushing it out* of his own body.

He also learns that there's another side to the coin.

When he accidentally uses his quirk and emits a burst of flame—thankfully when he's alone in the bathroom, because he never wants to use this in front of his mother again, never wants to remind her of his father again, *never wants to make her scream like that again*—he feels a tug of something that leaves him almost breathless. He feels like he's just let out a long breath, but hasn't taken in another breath yet. His hand twitches involuntarily, and a toothbrush comes soaring towards him.

It smacks him in the forehead before falling to the ground, and Izuku can only look down at it dumbly.

It takes a moment to click, and when it does, Izuku laughs and laughs until he feels sick, because he doesn't know what else to do.

He remembers that day when he was four, when he'd been walking home with his mother from the doctor's.

"I hope I get your quirk," he had told her. *"I hope I get your quirk, and*

not... not the one that hurt you so much. I want to protect you. I want to be a hero."

But it looks like he got both quirks. The one that hurts, and the one that could (maybe) protect.

He's not sure what to think of that.

*

Of course, things aren't as easy as just using one side of his quirk, because life isn't fair and it certainly isn't *kind.*

Izuku tries training his ability to pull things towards him, but it soon becomes clear that he can't only do that.

Once he uses half his quirk to pull something towards him, the other half of his quirk struggles and wants to push out fire. He tries to control the impulse, but it's physically taxing to keep it in.

It feels like trying to inhale, then inhale again without exhaling. You just can't keep doing it. At some point, you have to let out that breath else you choke and suffocate.

Pull and push. In and out. Like breathing.

Once Izuku pulls something towards him, he has to push out a bit of fire.

He can't use one part of his quirk without using the other.

And that—that almost *crushes* him, because Izuku promised his mother he'd protect and become a hero, but he also promised himself that he'd never use the fire that reminds them both so much of Hisashi.

He doesn't know what to do.

He doesn't know what he *can* do, without becoming like his father.

*

Izuku enters middle school and he's in the bathroom once more, this time staring at his own reflection in the mirror.

He thanks whatever higher powers there are that he doesn't look much like Hisashi. Midoriya Izuku takes after Midoriya Inko so much that even strangers would look at them and know their relation at first glance. They have the same soft round features, the same big eyes, and the same green irises.

But Izuku looks at his hair.

Inko's hair is straight, and the colour is a solid green.

Izuku's hair is curly, and the colour is more black that has a green sheen when the light hits it.

It's similar enough to his mother, but at the same time it has undeniable traces of *him. His* curly black hair, the image of which is still burned into Izuku's memories even after all these years.

He doesn't want his mother to look at him and see his father.

He doesn't want himself to look in the mirror and see his father.

Izuku slowly raises a hand and rakes back the hair from his forehead, smoothing it out on top of his head. He had grown out his hair so that it's at a length that it just barely brushes his chin. He can comfortably take it and twist half of it into a small messy bun, mimicking his mother's hairstyle. He sticks some bobby pins in to hold it in place and considers the end result in the mirror.

Most of the curls that used to make up his wild, fluffy hair are slicked back and pinned into the bun. There are some strands that fall out and frame his face, but they're not overly curly. Surely a far cry from the fluffy mop of hair it was before, and nodding more to Inko's hairstyle than Hisashi's own mess of curls.

Izuku nods to himself.

He is not going to be like his father.

*

When Izuku walks into the kitchen and Inko first sees his new hairstyle, she almost drops the plate of dumplings she has in her hands.

Izuku just shrugs with a half smile. “It was getting in my eyes,” he says by way of explanation. Then he wavers, because he knows she can see the similarity (the *difference)* and asks in a smaller voice. “Does it... does it look weird?” (Do you dislike it?)

Inko stares at her son for a moment more, before putting on a brave smile.

“You look lovely, dear.” (I’ll love you no matter what.)

*

Another year passes, and Izuku confronts his hero.

“Can you become a hero without a quirk?”

No, All Might answers his desperate question.

'No,' echoes a voice that sounds like the half-buried memory of his father. *'You are nothing without me.'*

You're wrong, Izuku tries to tell the voice, brushing away his tears. *I won’t use your quirk. I won’t become like you.*

But this cruel phantom only laughs and envelops Izuku’s hunched form in a mockery of an embrace, caressing the scars branded on his back, breathing flaming poison in his ear, *reminding* him.

'Like father, like son.'

*

But *yes,* All Might tells him later.

Izuku had seen Bakugo—the one person in the world who reminds him the most of his father, besides Izuku himself—in the suffocating embrace of the slime villain, and he didn't think. He just did what he had always done.

He stepped—well, he couldn’t exactly step between them yet, given that Bakugo was practically inside the villain, but he ran towards them, reaching with his quirk and *pulling* Bakugo despite the fact that he well knew the backlash would make him push out the flames he hated so much. At that moment, he didn’t care. He couldn’t care.

Bakugo was tugged out of the villain’s grasp, coughing up slime from his mouth. Izuku shoved the other boy behind him, finally stepping between him and the villain.

The buildup of his quirk had him panting, and Izuku knew he would have to push out some fire soon least he suffocated, so he clenched his teeth and *pushed* as small a flame as he could out of his hand. It felt similar to the sensation of trying to swallow down instead of coughing up blood bubbling up his throat, but at least now his quirk felt more balanced and he could breathe again.

Not that it helped the situation with the slime villain in front of him, but All Might had saved the day.

And now, he’s here in front of Izuku, telling him the one thing that Inko couldn’t confirm and Hisashi made him doubt and he himself wished for but perhaps never truly believed:

“*You can be a hero.*”

Chapter End Notes

> Before anyone starts bashing Inko in the comments, let me defend her first. Household abuse is a terrible thing, and the worst part is that you get used to it. You get used to being defeated and hopeless. So please, no Inko bashing. She, along with Izuku, will grow from their past. The Hurt is only here for the sake of the Comfort, Healing, and Fluff that will come later.
>
> As for Izuku’s new hairstyle, I picture it to be similar to Aizawa’s during that time he’s going around meeting the parents. Half his hair pulled into a low, messy, fluffy bun.
> Or, if you're familiar with Gangsta, picture it similar to Worick.

Except, you know, shorter (about chin length), curlier, fluffier, and, of course, greener.
Here's a picture: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/650180125024010240/this-is-probably-way-too-late-to-be-relevant-but

That said, I'm super excited to jump into the BNHA fandom!
(Does the Izuku headbang from Chapter 1)
Comments are love, and I'd love to hear what you all think.

And Icarus Burns His Wings

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Daedalus crafts wings of feathers and wax for himself and his son. He ties a pair of wings to his shivering son, ignoring the boy's wince as the straps dig harshly into his flesh.

“Be sure to follow me, boy,” Daedalus warns. “Never fly too high. Just follow me.”

“But father,” Icarus whispers. “I want to reach the sun.”

Daedalus’ face suddenly twists in rage.

“You *dare* defy me, boy?!” he spits out, and Icarus thinks he sees a jet of flame come out of his mouth like the fire-breathing monsters he’s only heard stories of.

The boy stumbles back, then turns his back to his father and takes off running, running, until the momentum builds under his wings and he’s *flying*.

Icarus yelps, terrified at first, but then he realizes that he’s actually free. He turns his face to the sun and reaches for it, flying higher, closer, until he thinks that maybe, just maybe, he can reach it. *Be* it.

But as Icarus nears the sun, this beacon of light and hope, its heat starts melting the wax and scorching the feathers of his wings.

And suddenly it’s not Icarus but Izuku whose wings are burning, burning, burning on his back and shoulders, and he hurts hurts hurts hurts so much and there’s a shrill voice that’s not his screaming in his ear and somewhere below him Daedalus—no, *Hisashi* laughs cruelly.

“You can never be the sun, boy. You belong down here, with me.” The man laughs, lazily flapping his own wings, his black black eyes dancing with malicious mirth. *“Like father, like son.”*

And those words *burn* more than any physical pain ever could.

So Izuku grits his teeth and straightens his hunched back. “No,” he says through his tears. “I will *not* be like you.”

Izuku forces his chin up and faces the sun once more, reaching for it with all his strength even as it makes the wings his father tied to him melt and burn and sear and scar his skin. Tears stream down his face but Izuku bares his teeth and strains and grasps and hopes and wishes and *pulls*—

—But then he is *pushed,* pushed back, pushed down, pushed away, and Izuku falls, falls, down to the sound of Hisashi's laughter and his mother's screams he falls—

—and Izuku wakes with a gasp.

He wakes to find his hands desperately scrabbling at his back and shoulders, and has to consciously force them down. His back *burns,* but he knows it's mostly only phantom pain aside from the scratches he must have given himself in his sleep. And that's—that's not exactly *good,* but it's okay, because Izuku has long since learned to bear physical pain.

It's a different kind of pain that makes his breath short.

Izuku grasps blindly in the dark until his hand closes on his phone. He pushes back the long locks of hair tumbling into his eyes with one hand while the other frantically flicks through his contacts.

The list isn't long—in fact, it's laughably short—but it takes an agonizingly long time for him to find what he's looking for because Izuku is shaking so much that his bloodied fingertips keep slipping over the screen.

This is dumb, he knows. This need to confirm that meeting All Might wasn't just a fever dream is dumb, irrational, and downright pathetic; and he knows that he won't even *find* All Might's name in his contacts list because he made sure that it *wouldn't* be there—what if he loses his phone, or someone hacks it? It's not impossible with his rotten luck, and he will *never* endanger All Might's secret like that—so at best, all he'll find is the pseudonym he saved the hero's number under, but—

There. There it is. Izuku's entire body stills as his thumb hovers over the screen detailing All Might's contact info.

It has the series of numbers that Izuku religiously memorized by heart the moment he received them. It has the pseudonym he secretly saved

them under.

The Sun

A sound that's something between a strangled sob and a wretched laugh makes its way out of Izuku's mouth. He muffles it against the back of his hand, not wanting to wake his mother. He clutches his phone tightly to his chest with both hands and his hair spills around his face in messy curls as he hunches protectively over it.

He doesn't even care that he's being pathetic anymore. Because he has All Might's number on his phone, which means he actually met his hero, and he really asked Izuku to be his successor, and told him *he could be a hero.*

Izuku kneels on his bed with his phone clutched to his chest and phantom fire burning his back and silent sobs and laughter choked in his throat.

He is going to be All Might's successor. He is going to be a beacon of hope. He is going to be a hero.

He is not going to be like his father.

Even if he has to burn himself down.

*

Izuku hasn't had many—or *any*—positive older figures to look up to that he could actually meet in real life and not just fan-stalk on the internet. But now that the very person who's been the oldest subject of said fan-stalking is living, breathing, and puking blood in front of him, Izuku doesn't know how to act.

The training part is easy, because while Izuku has never had enough guidance to actually be able to train his body—Inko couldn't help no matter how much she wanted to, those who *could* help *didn't* want to, Izuku wasn't dumb enough to try to train by himself without professional supervision, and he would never dare ask his mother to enroll him in some gym or dojo and put even more strain on her—All Might has done all the heavy lifting for him. The man has already drawn up an entire training plan and even now is making adjustments

as necessary as he gets to know Izuku's body better. All Izuku has to do is push through his exhaustion and pain enough to just stick to the plan made for him.

And pain?

That's something that Izuku is *more* than familiar with.

So no, despite All Might's initial worries, Izuku is fine with the training itself, gruelling and hard as it is.

What unsettles him is his interactions with his... his *mentor,* he supposes. (And god, did he almost have a heart attack right then and there when he first realized that he was now qualified to call *All Might* his *mentor.)*

The thing is, the first time All Might had called him "my boy," Izuku had almost *flinched.*

"My boy," Izuku had to remind himself. Not harsh and impersonal, not a barked "boy!" that's more a command than a call, but *"my* boy," warm and encouraging and even—dare he say it—affectionate.

But even so, the endearment catches Izuku off guard from time to time, and he has to take a moment blinking wildly before he can respond with an appropriate smile. And that *frustrates* Izuku. Hisashi has *no right* tainting the one pure good thing in his life, and the man does it without even trying. Without even having been present for the last nine years. It's just... so *unfair.*

...But then again, Izuku already knows that life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't *kind.*

Everything good Izuku has ever has hoped for has either been stripped away from him or left broken in his hands.

He can't let that happen to All Might.

So Izuku will do whatever it takes to protect his hero.

(Even if he has to burn himself down.)

*

“All Might?”

Toshinori turns his head towards young Midoriya. They’re taking a short break at the moment, and he must say, he’s impressed. Toshinori himself knows more than anyone that the training plan he set up is gruelling, if not downright harsh. But this bright boy has never complained or shied away even once.

He can’t help but smile at the child. He’s stubbornly wearing a long-sleeved shirt and pants again even in the summer sun, though today his hair isn’t in its usual half bun. Instead, Midoriya has gathered all his dark hair into a low ponytail. Stray locks have fallen out of the tie, curling around his flushed face, and the ends of his bushy ponytail peak out over his shoulders.

He’s adorable, Toshinori confirms solemnly with a decisive nod.

If the usual half bun had looked like the small fluffy tuft of a rabbit’s tail, then this ponytail reminds him of something bushier. The tail of some kind of... dog? Yes, but which...

Toshinori peers down at the boy, concentrating so hard that he doesn’t notice the bemused expression on his subject of study.

“...All Mi—?”

“A pomeranian!” Toshinori bursts out triumphantly, and young Midoriya jumps slightly with a bewildered look.

“...What?”

Toshinori blinks, then grins, rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly.

“Ah, my apologies. I’m afraid I lost myself in thought. What was it you wanted to say, my boy?”

And there’s that little spasm. Toshinori has noticed that Midoriya tended to do that from time to time, usually at the phrase “my boy.” He’s not quite sure as to why. Perhaps this endearment puts his fanboy heart into overdrive?

But Midoriya smiles shyly at him before Toshinori can ask, and his heart melts a little at the boy’s expression. Like he said, *adorable.*

“I... I wanted to ask you a question, if it’s not too much of a bother.”

Toshinori smiles down at the boy.

“Your hesitation is endearing,” the boy lets out a little eep, an embarrassed but pleased blush spreading across his face, “but we’ve got to work on your self-confidence. Of course you can ask me a question!”

Midoriya smiles with tentative gratefulness, then looks down at his own hands with a slight frown.

“I don’t… It’s not that I don’t trust your judgement,” he starts carefully. “But are you sure that it’s best to pass on One For All to me as soon as my body is ready?”

Toshinori spits out blood. Well, whatever he’d had been expecting, it certainly wasn’t that.

“Why do you say that? I would have thought you’d be anxious to inherit it.” And Toshinori is truly confused because young Midoriya has been nothing but eager and willing in his training.

“It’s just,” the boy takes a breath. “If I get One For All as soon as my body is physically capable of hosting it, I won’t be able to use it. Even if I inherit your quirk, I won’t automatically inherit your position as the number one hero and symbol of peace as well. I’ll be little more than a glorified vessel.”

Midoriya lifts his head now and looks straight at Toshinori.

“But people need the symbol of peace. People need the beacon of hope. People need you, not me. So please, keep One For All for as long as you need to, and only pass it on to me when you can’t contain it anymore. I can wait. I can be an insurance, and protect you and your legacy. But empowering me means weakening you, and I don't want… I can't do that.”

And the boy says this meeting Toshinori’s sunken wide eyes, his gaze unwavering, his voice firm.

He’s serious, Toshinori realizes. Worse, he’s *sincere*.

He’s sincerely giving up his best chance to fulfill his dream for the good of others, is casually dismissing himself, and urging Toshinori to prioritize All Might’s name over his own dreams.

Part of Toshinori is touched at the boy's words because it has been years since anyone had said they'll protect him, but another part of him twists in horror at the casual disregard the boy points to himself.

Selflessness and bravery is the reason Toshinori chose Midoriya, but there is a point where even the best qualities turn into a vice.

Toshinori places his hands on either side of Midoriya's shoulders. He stoops to look the boy in the eye and wills him to feel the truth in his words.

"Midoriya, my boy. You are not a backup plan."

He freezes, eyes wide. Toshinori's heart *aches* because that's just proof that he'd hit home, but he continues, still keeping eye contact.

"It's true that you may not be able to fully wield One For All as soon as you receive it. But that's the point. The point is to train you so that you *can,* so that you *become* ready to take my place. You are not a backup plan, but *the* plan. You are not a spare, or a second choice, or an insurance, or merely a vessel. You are *the one.* And you *will be* the number one hero."

Toshinori pauses, looking down into the wide eyes of Midoriya.

"That is, only if you yourself do your best, of course. Will you?"

Midoriya's eyes are suspiciously bright, but he swallows and whispers "yes." He shakes his head, blinking a few times, and meets Toshinori's gaze again with a look that's less lost and more determined. *"Yes,"* he says firmly.

Toshinori grins.

"Good. And stop selling yourself short, my boy! Humbleness and low self-worth are not the same things. Remember, you've already saved me."

"...All I did was try to protect Bakugo, and in the end, I couldn't even do that," Midoriya protests, a thoroughly bemused look on his face. Toshinori chuckles.

"The day we first met, your deeds are what spurred me into action. You kept me from becoming a sorry excuse that's all talk. You reminded me what it is to be a true hero. You *saved* me."

Toshinori gently taps the boy's chest, right over his heart.

"Protecting someone from bodily harm isn't all there is to being a hero. You have to look here, too, in order to truly save them. And you,

my boy, have already saved me. So don't ever let yourself believe that you're not a hero."

It's one of his better speeches, if Toshinori would say so himself. (And believe him, he's given a lot of speeches.)

But for some reason, young Midoriya looks like he's ready to cry.

*

"I'm home, Mom."

"Welcome back, darling," Inko's reply comes from the kitchen, her voice soft by habit even after all these years.

Izuku quietly makes his way towards her. He stops by the kitchen entrance and wordlessly watches his mother work. She has her dark green hair up in its usual half-do. Her form has slowly filled out ever since Hisashi left and she has actually been able to eat when and what she pleases, and has a pink apron thrown on top of herself at the moment.

She looks so peaceful and happy, and it's because *Hisashi* isn't here anymore. It has nothing to do with what *Izuku* did.

Izuku remembers his—three? four?—year-old self smiling at her after the first time he took a beating for her.

"I protected you," he had said, smiling with elation and pride.

But Inko had responded with a sob. *"I'm sorry,"* she had cried. *"I'm so, so, sorry, Izuku."*

He had already known something was wrong then. Izuku can't regret having protected his mother, but All Might has just driven home that *protecting* her has never been enough.

Izuku has never been enough.

His back *burns.*

Inko turns around, smiling softly at the sight of her son wordlessly watching her with unreadable eyes.

“Yes, dear?”

Izuku takes in a long breath.

Did I hurt you? Did I end up hurting you even more than you already were? What should I have done? How could I have saved you? Why did you say you were sorry? Why did you cry? Why…

“…It’s nothing.”

*

The months fly by, and before he knows it Izuku has left the newly cleaned up beach, inherited One For All *(“Eat this”)* and is now at the practical part of UA’s entrance exam. He has to take down as many robots as he can within the allotted time, which is a feat that can’t be done without utilizing a quirk.

But Izuku has never been quirkless, regardless of what Bakugo said or he himself wished. And right now, what Izuku wants has nothing on what he *needs* to do.

Even though he’s received One For All this morning, Izuku knows he can’t use it yet without his limbs going—to borrow All Might’s expression—“kaboom.” But he’s known this since he started training. He’s planned accordingly.

Quirk analysis has been Izuku’s specialty out of necessity. First he started studying quirks frantically in an attempt to find a way to suppress his fire, then in desperation when he found out his quirk was a double-edged sword, and finally in resignation to find a way to be a hero without using his quirk.

From what Izuku has analyzed about One For All, it stockpiles and passes on each wielder’s power. But in essence, it’s an enhancement quirk.

With a power like that, enhancing your physical body seems like the obvious choice. But Izuku can’t do that yet.

So what if he enhances his quirk instead?

As if on cue, a robot comes screeching around the corner towards

Izuku. It's only a one point bot, yet it still towers over him, easily larger and heavier than anything Izuku has ever been able to pull before.

But he plants his feet, reaches out a hand, and *pulls.*

The robot comes *flying* with surprising speed. It would have crushed Izuku if he hadn't purposefully maneuvered and put a sturdy looking lamp post between them beforehand. The force of the robot crashing into it causes the top of the lamp post to snap, and the jagged edge impales the hunk of metal.

Izuku doesn't even have the luxury to watch his handiwork, though, because already his fire is building up pressure, clamouring to be let out, howling and clawing like a wild beast.

'Let it out,' a poisonous voice breathes in his ear. *'You **know** how strong fire is.'* A ghostly touch brushes over his shoulder blades, over his scars.

Izuku grits his teeth.

No, he tells it. *I won't use it **because** I know exactly how strong, how destructive it is.*

I will never be like you.

The buildup is a physical pain now. Just as One For All has enhanced the *pull,* the *push* part of his quirk seems to have strengthened as well. Izuku clamps down on it, forcing it as small as he can manage. He's yet to let it out, though, and it feels like holding his breath, like he's slowly suffocating, but he can't just let loose a random blaze of fire when other students are moving erratically around him and someone can get hurt—

And Izuku hates it, but the perfect solution comes to mind.

He clamps a hand over his mouth and lets out the tiniest flame he can manage. Fire comes spilling out of his mouth like coughing up blood, but it's blocked by his palm before it can break free into the world. His throat burns, but he knows it's less actual physical pain and more psychological at the thought that he's breathing fire the same way Hisashi used to.

A few more fiery coughs wrack Izuku's body, but they're over soon enough and he's able to take his hand away and straighten his back.

His palm is smoking and red, but it's a second degree burn at most. He can ignore the pain. It's not like he hasn't had worse, after all.

Izuku looks from his red palm to the impaled robot.

"Okay," he whispers shakily, "I can do this."

Izuku may hate his fire, and hate *breathing* fire even more, but if it gives him a way to use his pull while not harming others, he'll take it.

His father's quirk hurts people. His mother's quirk might be able to protect people.

Just like he promised when he was four, Izuku can do this with just his mother's power. He can become a hero with just his mother's power. The fire may be an unfortunate side effect, but he won't actively use it. He won't let it control him. He won't let it hurt anyone (but him).

"Okay," he repeats, swiping the back of his hand over his mouth.

Izuku squares his shoulders and takes off running.

*

Izuku quickly forms a pattern. Find a robot, *pull* it so it goes crashing into the side of a building or even another robot if he's lucky, cough up flames into his hand like All Might coughs up blood, then take off again.

The amount of fire Izuku is letting *push* out of him is minuscule compared to the amount he's *pulling,* and the strain makes itself known. It feels like taking in a long breath and letting out only a quick, short gasp.

It leaves him feeling breathless and panting, but it *works.* Thanks to the power boost One For All grants his pull, he can manage. He even has somewhat of an advantage because as long as Izuku can spot a robot, he can pull and destroy it before anyone else gets to it.

Things seem to be going well.

Which is, of course, the precise moment everything goes wrong.

A commotion breaks out somewhere behind Izuku, and he turns to find a skyscraper on wheels.

Izuku gapes for a moment—*that's* the zero pointer? Are you fucking serious?!—and is about to make a run for it when he spots a girl crumpled on the ground, right in the path of the zero pointer.

And Izuku doesn't know this girl. He's never seen her, or talked to her, or even noticed her before. But the moment he sees the tears in her eyes, there's only one thing he can do.

He steps between them.

*

Izuku's mind is in overdrive.

Pulling the girl towards him will maybe buy them a few seconds, but ultimately it will be no use since the zero pointer will still be after them. If Izuku wants to protect—no, *save*—this girl, he has to stop the robot.

Izuku flings his arms straight up towards the head of the robot towering above him and *pulls,* hoping to embed its head in the ground. But either his pull isn't strong enough even with One For All or he just doesn't have good enough control over it yet, because instead of the robot's head being pulled towards him, *he* is pulled towards *it.*

He has just enough time to think *oh shit* as he rockets through the air before he's face to giant face with the zero pointer.

Again, Izuku's mind is in overdrive.

He can already feel the flame building up inside him, but what can a little fire do to a humongous hunk of metal? Neither his pull or his push will be of any use here.

That leaves only one option.

And if his limbs *do* go "kaboom," well, All Might himself did say that a hero has to push through his own pain for the sake of others.

And Izuku is *more* than familiar with pain.

Izuku draws back a fist before gravity takes hold of him. One For All envelops his right arm like green lightning, crackling with raw power.

Clench your buttocks and scream from the bottom of your heart! All Might's voice rings in his ears, and despite the situation, Izuku bares his teeth in a grin.

SMASH!!

The robot's face folds into itself, and it crumples like pressed garbage. Izuku feels a whoop of elation before gravity finally takes hold of him and he starts falling after the downed robot.

Oh shit, he thinks again, mind once more going in overdrive.

Quick, think, think, *think*. He's shattered his right arm from that smash and it's flopping uselessly at his side now, but he still has another arm and two legs left. He could try breaking his fall with another smash. But if he's even a moment too soon or late, he's done for. Then what else...

Oh. Oh, shit. He has a solution, and his quirk is not going to be happy about it. Izuku hasn't even pushed out the fire that his initial pull cost him, so pulling *again* will make the backlash a *bitch,* but it's the best plan he has right now.

From his initial move, Izuku now knows that trying to pull something greater than his capacity makes him shoot towards it, giving him mobility that he didn't have before. Pulling again without pushing is going to come back to bite him in the ass, but he can do it. Probably.

Izuku reaches out his left hand to the falling zero point bot and *pulls*.

His free-fall is broken as his body is whipped towards the zero pointer's head. He smacks against it feet first, skidding a bit until he gains balance on the falling robot, and hangs on with one arm while it crashes to the ground. Izuku rides it like a surfboard, letting the giant hunk of metal absorb most of the impact. He grits his teeth as the shockwaves make his shattered arm wave wildly in the wind like a piece of cloth, but otherwise, he's unharmed.

The dust finally settles, and Izuku stands up on top of the fallen zero pointer's head.

He spots the girl he'd tried to protect floating on top of a piece of metal nearby. She has a hand stretched out in his direction as if she

was trying to reach him. Their eyes meet.

“Are you okay?” they ask at the same time.

They blink, then start laughing together. And continuing their synchronization, they both start puking at the exact same moment too.

The girl drops from the air and throws up on the ground.

Izuku doubles over as he retches and flames come *spilling* out of his mouth.

He doesn’t know why, but he actually feels physically sick. The flames burn his throat and his palm, harsher and far more intense from having been kept back for so long. Izuku drops to his knees and clamps his good hand over his mouth in a desperate attempt to keep the volatile flames to himself so that they won’t hurt anyone. He heaves, violent bursts of fire wracking his body as it pushes out of him forcefully with vengeance.

He’d been right. The backlash is a *bitch.*

When the side effect finally runs its course and subdues, Izuku is left shaking and shivering. So when Present Mic announces the end of the test, it’s almost a relief.

*

+ Omake +

All Might: pukes blood

Izuku: pukes fire

Uraraka: just plain pukes

Welcome to the Puke Club, otherwise known as the Bile Band or the Thrower Uppers.

Chapter End Notes

Wikipedia: Pomeranians are typically friendly, playful and lively; but they can be aggressive with other dogs to try to prove themselves
Me: DEKU

Also, don’t listen to Izuku. Even a second degree burn can be serious, make sure to take care of it properly, please, I’m begging you.

This one's a bit of a filler chapter. I can’t wait to write the sports festival arc and the shenanigans that happen in the dorms, but it feels so far away... In the meantime, for the next chapter: finally talking about his quirk with All Might, and perhaps even an extra serving of Bakugo?

Thank you for all your comments! I can’t even express how much they all mean to me. (Does the Izuku headbang)
I won’t reply to all of them, but know that I read, re-read, and treasure every single one. Your comments are what motivates me to keep going.

They Say To Never Meet Your Heroes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A week after the practical exams finds Izuku discreetly swiping the envelope from UA and stealing into his room before his mother can see it. He hasn't told Inko that he'd applied to UA yet, not wanting to get her hopes up only to chance disappointing her. If he gets in, she's in for a (hopefully) pleasant surprise. If he doesn't, Izuku will be the only one who has to deal with the disappointment. What Inko doesn't know can't hurt her.

He tears the envelope and a small round device falls out, letting loose a hologram with All Might's unmistakable face filling the entire screen.

Izuku's heart simultaneously jumps to his throat and sinks to his gut at the sight of his hero.

Oh. Oh *shit.* Izuku had known that whoever was grading the practical exam would see him use his quirk from the many cameras he's sure were littered around the arena. He was okay with the staff of UA seeing his quirk, but he'd never banked on *All Might* being a part of that panel and seeing his quirk too.

During the months they trained, All Might had never once brought up Izuku's inherited quirk. Maybe he hadn't noticed Izuku use it against the slime villain, or maybe training for One For All was just too urgent that he never got around to it. Izuku doesn't know. He'd been too relieved to ask.

But now that All Might has presumably seen him throw around (and throw up) his quirk left and right, he's bound to ask about it.

That is not a conversation Izuku is looking forward to.

For the moment, though, All Might's projection thankfully makes no comment on that particular subject as he buoyantly runs through Izuku's results.

"You did fine on the written test, and at the practical you earned a decent score of 40 points. But wait, there's more! Behold this screen!"

And another screen pops up behind All Might, who's also in a screen, so... how many walls is this breaking?

But Izuku's dry musings are cut short when he sees the familiar face of the girl he'd protected from the zero point bot.

"Uhh, sorry to bother you, but... Do you know the boy with greenish black hair? He tied it back in a half-bun, and he looks, uh, kinda like a bunny, do you know who I'm talking about?"

And no, Izuku *doesn't* know, because—a bunny? Is that... is that supposed to be *him? ...How?*

But despite his utter confusion, the girl continues on.

"Would it be possible to share some of my points with him?"

At that, Izuku freezes.

The girl gives a sheepish smile, rubbing the back of her neck with four fingers.

"I mean, he was strong enough to take down that giant robot, and he didn't even need my help landing from the fall, so I guess someone like that might already have enough points. But... but I still want to do something to say thank you."

The girl looks up into the camera, and her bright eyes are earnestly honest.

"He *saved* me."

And those words sound like salvation to his ears.

Izuku muffles a strangled gasp against the back of his hand.

He saved me, she had said. She said he *saved* her, not just protected her. She *thanked* him, not apologized to him.

I'm so sorry, the memory of a broken sob whispers in his mind.

But *Thank you,* says the voice of another, not loud enough to drown out the sobs entirely but enough to keep Izuku afloat. He clutches a hand over his heart that hurts so much but feels so *good.*

All Might smiles at him kindly through the screen.

“More than anything, it is your actions that have touched people.”

He explains the concept of rescue points, showing a multitude of raised numbers.

“So take your 60 rescue points! And combined with your 40 combat points, that brings you up to a whopping 100 points!!”

All Might grins, extending one hand.

“Come, Midoriya, my boy! This is your hero academia!”

And for once, Izuku is able to smile back instantly at the phrase “my boy.”

*

Later that night, Izuku heads over to the Dagobah seaside park. He finds All Might’s skeletal form gazing over the cleared beach and sea, the sand and waves reflecting moonlight with a soft glow.

A surge of pride fills him. This beach is yet another thing that Izuku has managed to grasp without breaking it. The emotional high from seeing the acceptance letter and hearing the girl’s thanks is only bolstered further by the sight of his hero gazing peacefully at the beautiful scenery that Izuku himself wrought with his own hands.

“All Might?”

Despite his soft voice, the man jumps and spins around violently.

“Goodness, young Midoriya! You sure know how to move quietly!”

Izuku blinks. Treading lightly to the point of having almost no presence is a skill both he and Inko had unconsciously learned in a desperate attempt to avoid Hisashi’s notice and beating for as long as possible. (Unless Hisashi was beating Inko. Then Izuku would *make* himself known.) He hadn’t noticed it at home because both he and his mother were so used to it, but it seems even a decade hasn’t been enough to erase the habit.

Before he can stutter an apology, All Might grins brightly at him and holds out a hand.

“Never mind that, now. Congratulations on passing, and in first place too! I hear that it’s been years since anyone has passed with a triple-digit score!”

Izuku flushes, both at the praise and at the fact that *he’s just high fived All Might, oh my god, he feels like he’s shooting straight to heaven—*

“The way you utilized One For All and your own quirk was quite impressive, although they both seem to have unfortunate side effects. We haven’t had time to talk about your natural quirk, let alone One For All, but you use some kind of telekinesis, right?”

Aaaand Izuku comes crashing back down to earth.

All Might is looking at Izuku expectantly with raised brows, asking for an explanation without blatantly pressuring him.

But of course he feels pressure.

Izuku would never lie to his hero. But that doesn’t mean he can just go on and say *‘yeah, so, my quirk also forces me to push out fire, which I inherited from my abusive father who used it to hurt me and my mother, giving us pyrophobia for a while, not to mention that when I first used it my mother* ***screamed****, so I swore never to use it consciously. Oh, and did I mention that it scarred me for life too?’* That’s just—you just don’t *do* that.

Even if—or perhaps all the more because—All Might is his hero, Izuku isn’t going to shove his baggage down the man’s throat.

“It’s... it’s not really telekinesis,” he starts hesitantly. “I can only pull things in the direction towards myself, and as you’ve probably seen, it forces out a bit of fire as a backlash.”

Stick to the facts, he tells himself, desperately trying to keep his cool. This is the first time in... well, *ever* that he’s talking about his quirk to someone, and it feels strange to the point of being surreal.

“Stop right there. You were throwing up *fire?”* All Might asks incredulously.

Izuku blinks. Huh. If All Might hadn’t noticed any flames coming out of his mouth, then it looks like he’d been able to keep it to himself better than he’d thought.

Good.

The man is gaping at Izuku now like he's the most outrageous thing he's ever seen. "You were vomiting *fire.* Then your hand... you kept it over your mouth... does your own fire burn you?"

Izuku waves his arms frantically at All Might's worry, showing his fully healed left palm. Recovery Girl had literally kissed it better along with his right arm that had been shattered from One For All, so there isn't any trace of the burn right now.

"It doesn't burn me all the time," he says quickly to pacify All Might, and it's true. No matter how high Izuku's pain tolerance is, if he'd been burned every time he used his quirk his hand would have been little more than a smouldering stump by the time the practical exam ended. And as for his mouth...

Fire has never burned his mouth.

(Just like it never burned Hisashi when he breathed fire too.)

(It's one of the reasons the idea of breathing fire out of his mouth had come so readily to Izuku. Because he'd *known* it wouldn't burn.)

Izuku stills his hands and looks down at them.

"I'm not sure why sometimes it burns me and sometimes it doesn't. Maybe it's just random. I haven't... I haven't used my quirk much before, so I don't know too much about it either. I just figured it would be worth giving a shot, now that I'm enhanced with One For All."

All Might is still looking at Izuku like he's grown a second head or something.

"Still, if it *burns* you..."

He shrugs. "Well, it was either that or shatter all my limbs," he points out, and the man finally stops giving him the look and sheepishly rubs the back of his neck.

"Ah, yes. You have a point, I suppose." He coughs, though thankfully he doesn't cough up blood this time. "Well, I can see why you would have been reluctant to use a quirk like that."

The pain *isn't* the reason, but Izuku doesn't correct him.

*

Toshinori and young Midoriya are chatting and relaxing at the moonlit beach when Toshinori blinks down at the package the boy brought with him.

“By the way, what did you bring?” he asks curiously. He can’t help it. The small packet is wrapped in All Might printed wrapping paper, after all.

“Oh!” the boy jumps, scrambling to pick up the packet. He hesitates for a moment before holding it out to his mentor.

“It’s... it’s actually for you,” he says, blushing a bit. “It’s a thank you gift for... *everything.* I didn’t have much time to prepare so it’s not much, and I’m not sure you’d even like it, but...”

And as adorable as it is, Toshinori puts a hand on Midoriya’s shoulder, effectively cutting off his rambling.

“My boy,” he says, and there’s a fond affection in his voice again that he can’t help. “Whatever it is, I’m sure I’ll love it. Thank you.”

“Well, technically it’s *my* thank you to *you,* but, um,” Midoriya mumbles embarrassedly, then shoves the package into Toshinori’s waiting hands as if to cut himself off before he can say anything more.

Toshinori carefully tears the wrapping paper that has his own face printed all over it, and out comes a small, white, fluffy stuffed animal, just a little larger than the size of his fist (in his true form). He’s a little taken back at first because while he doesn’t *dislike* it, it seems a little out of the blue.

But then he realizes *what* animal it is, and chokes.

Young Midoriya is fidgeting nervously.

“I, um. You never really talked about what you like in your interviews, so I didn’t, um. I don’t know what kind of food you like, and didn’t want to get you something that you don’t or can’t eat. And you mentioned this one time, so I guessed you might like it...?”

And the boy jumps then smiles tentatively as Toshinori *laughs* delightedly, cupping the stuffed animal in his hands.

It's a pomeranian.

A pomeranian.

The man chokes on his laughter, holding the small doll to his chest. Oh god, he's laughing so much he has tears in his eyes, and that hasn't happened in ages. This child is *priceless.*

"I like bunny rabbits too," he tells the boy through his laughter, eyeing the small tuft of green hair that looks so much like a rabbit's tail.

It's obvious from Midoriya's bewildered expression that he has no clue whatsoever why Toshinori is laughing so much, and it makes the situation all the more adorable.

Come to think of it, that girl from the practical exam had also described Midoriya's bun as a rabbit's tail too, hadn't she? What was it she said? *He looks kinda like a bunny,* was it?

Toshinori *laughs.*

*

The next time they meet, young Midoriya gives him another wrapped gift. It's a small, white, fluffy stuffed animal again.

But this time, it's a rabbit.

Toshinori laughs so hard that he straight up starts puking blood and has to hold up the bunny over his head as he vomits in order to not get blood on it. But oh, is it worth it.

Even with blood in his mouth and Midoriya fussing over him, Toshinori smiles.

He wonders if this is the joy of having a child.

*

Izuku's high school year begins by being accosted at the front door of class 1-A by a tall spectacled boy.

"Hello, I am Iida Tenya from Soumei Junior High School!" he says, gesturing wildly in Izuku's face. Izuku thinks he vaguely remembers him zooming around in the same arena during the practical exams.

"Midoriya," wait, he knows his name? "I must hand it to you. You divined the actual nature of the practical exam, didn't you? I... was blind to it, and you came in first place! I hate to admit it, but you were the better man!"

And thanks to Iida's remark about Izuku coming in first place, now everyone in the class is looking at him. Including Bakugo, whose look is more of a murderous glare.

Thankfully Izuku is saved from having to say anything and disrupt the sudden silence himself when the very girl he met at the exam comes in.

"Ah!" she exclaims happily as she steps inside the classroom behind Izuku. "It's you! Bunny-hair guy!"

And just, *what.*

Bunny-hair guy?

...How?

Izuku stares blankly at her as the girl practically radiates happiness.

"I'm so glad to see you! I wanted to say thank you in person!"

That shakes Izuku out of his blank disbelief.

"I heard that you tried to share your points with me," he says softly. And then he *smiles* at her. *"Thank you."*

The girl looks taken back at Izuku's expression for a moment, perhaps not expecting the sheer sincerity in it. But soon she beams back.

"I was trying to thank *you,* silly!" she laughs.

But no, Izuku isn't just thanking her for the points. He's thanking her for her words, for her smile. She had proved to him that he can be a hero that saves people's hearts, not just protect them from physical wounds while leaving their hearts shattered on the ground. She has

shown him salvation.

Before he can find a way to articulate that into words, someone else cuts in.

“If you want to go hunting for friends, do it elsewhere,” a voice drifts up from the ground behind the girl. Izuku turns his head towards the chronically tired voice and sees a giant caterpillar—no, a sleeping bag, he belatedly realizes. He looks at the face poking out of the dull yellow folds to find—

“Eraserhead?!” he sputters.

The man blinks up at him from the ground.

“...That’s Aizawa-sensei to you,” the hero says, still blinking slowly on the ground. “Got anything to say?”

Izuku wonders for a wild moment if he can get away with saying *‘I’ve had your face taped to my wall for the past decade.’*

Probably not.

*

Izuku is a hardcore fan of heroes and quirks in general, but there have only ever been two individuals he would call “my hero” even in the confines of his own mind.

The first is, of course, All Might. The symbol of peace, the beacon of hope, the number one hero. The one who gave him the courage to step between people like Hisashi or Bakugo and their victims, the one who taught him to keep getting up, and the one who, now, is his mentor.

The only other hero who’s been elevated to that same pedestal had gotten and stayed there since the moment Izuku and Inko watched Hisashi’s arrest on TV.

Izuku had followed Eraserhead’s career as religiously as All Might’s, so he’d known that the hero is a teacher in UA. It had been another reason he was desperate to get in this school, after all. But knowing that isn’t the same thing as *actually meeting his hero and finding out he’s*

their homeroom teacher.

Izuku follows Eraserhead's—no, *Aizawa's* instructions to change to their P.E. uniforms in a daze. He notices in the back of his mind that while the others' sleeves only come down to their elbows, save for a few whose bodies don't allow for sleeves in the first place, Izuku's own P.E. uniform has long sleeves that come all the way down to his wrists, just like he'd requested.

The quirk assessment test that follows is just barely enough to shake Izuku out of his daze.

Izuku has never really used his quirk at all, let alone in a test, before the UA entrance exam. Already he's at a disadvantage to his other classmates who have been living and training with their quirks for their entire lives. Izuku, on the other hand, is almost as foreign with his own quirk as with One For All.

Almost, being the key word.

Thanks to the fiasco with the zero pointer, Izuku now knows that with his One For All enhanced pull, he can pull *himself* towards things with surprising force. Landing is going to be hard because he has nothing to counteract the pull, not to mention he's going to have to puke fire into his hand again to keep it to himself and not burn any of his classmates, but it's better than nothing.

For the 50 meter dash and the standing long jump, Izuku *pulls* himself towards whatever building is on the other side of the track. He let's go of the pull as soon as he's cleared the finish line and has to wildly skid forward a few meters before the momentum dies. Then he's coughing flames into his hand again.

For the grip test, he just *pulls* the grip toward him. And, of course, vomits fire again.

The hardest actually turns out to be the sustained sideways jump. He tries pulling himself towards the school building on the left, then the gym on the right, then back again to the left and so on in quick succession. But as he'd already proved in the practical exam, using his *pull* repeatedly without paying the price of the *push* only makes it build up until it's a physical pain and the backlash is downright *punishing.*

Izuku ends up having to stop halfway through the exercise to drop to his knees and retch, a hand clasped desperately over his mouth as his

whole body shakes with the force of his heaving. He ends up in last place for the sideways jump. Some of his classmates worry for him and ask if he's alright. Izuku just wipes his mouth on his sleeve and stands up with a shaky smile.

Luckily—or unluckily, depending on how you look at it—Izuku's quirk isn't of any help in the endurance running or the seated toe touch. So he just does it normally without a quirk and takes the opportunity to take a breather.

By the time the last event comes around, Izuku feels better. His left palm is burned again, but it doesn't matter since he'll be using his right hand for the ball pitch.

His pull isn't going to be of any help here either.

Maybe he can use his fire to *push,* like Bakugo used his explosions, but —no. *No.* Izuku squashes that thought before it can progress further. He will not actively use his fire. It may be an unfortunate part of his quirk, but he's going to use his mother's and All Might's quirk to become a hero.

Never his father's.

Izuku quickly does the math in his head. So far, his results are decent. He did place dead last in the sustained sideways jump, but in all the others he is usually at the top ten, if not the top five. As long as he doesn't drop the ball at his feet, he'll be safe from expulsion, at least.

His name is called for the ball pitch. Izuku takes in a breath, and steps forward.

*

Aizawa knows the look of pure awe and unadulterated admiration.

He's met plenty of other heroes and even works with well-known heroes as colleagues, after all; he's seen it often enough in the faces of students, mostly pointed to Midnight and even Present Mic. So yes, he knows what it looks like.

He's just never had it pointed at *him.*

And that's not all. Not to mention that he recognized Aizawa as Eraserhead at first sight, but the look Midoriya Izuku gives him isn't just flimsy hero worship or even vague admiration. It's almost *reverent.* And Aizawa... has no idea how to deal with that.

So he ignores it.

What he *isn't* going to ignore, though, is Midoriya's quirk.

The kid has an undeniably useful quirk that can be versatile with the right imagination and application, as he's proved both in the entrance exams and this quirk assessment test. But the problem is that it comes at a cost.

Every time the kid uses his quirk, he has to double over and clamp a hand tightly over his mouth as he coughs violently.

It's not uncommon for quirks to have downsides. Uraraka threw up at the end of the practical exam, Aoyama can only use his laser for one second at a time, and even Aizawa himself suffers from dry eye.

So while Midoriya's quirk has drawbacks, quirks can be trained, just like muscles. The kid himself has potential and resolve, so Aizawa is betting that with the proper training he'll manage. His potential is not zero, that's for sure.

He doesn't warrant an expulsion. But an early warning might be in place.

As Midoriya prepares his first ball pitch, Aizawa reaches into a deep pocket in his jumpsuit and pulls out a small bouncy ball. As soon as Midoriya throws the ball, Aizawa erases his quirk and tosses his bouncy ball at him simultaneously.

Midoriya shows impressive situational awareness and reflexes when his left hand (palm red with at least a first, if not a second-degree burn, Aizawa notes) comes flying up to snatch it out of the air before it can hit his head, even as the softball he'd thrown lands a meagre 46 meters. He turns to look at Aizawa in confusion, although there's still that underlying layer of sheer admiration and reverence in his gaze. Aizawa does his best to ignore it as he points at the bouncy ball in the kid's hand.

"I erased your quirk," he says, (not knowing that Midoriya never planned to use it at the ball pitch in the first place anyway.) "I've noticed the side effect of your quirk. If you used your quirk just now,

you would have been too busy throwing up to catch that. And if that ball was a bomb, you'd be dead. Not to mention that you had to drop out halfway through the side jump because of your backlash. If it was a real situation, you'd be doubly dead."

He looks the kid in the eye. "A villain isn't going to politely wait for you. They'll beat you while you're down. If you want to become a hero, you're going to have to figure out a way around your limits before they get you killed."

Aizawa beckons with a hand, and Midoriya hesitates before gently tossing the bouncy ball back at him. He plucks it out of the air and nods to the pile of softballs.

"Keep that in mind, kid, if you don't want to die. Now, I gave you back your quirk. Hurry up and do your second ball pitch."

Midoriya hesitates though, bowing his head with the ball in his hand as if thinking.

From what Aizawa has gathered, his quirk seems to be some kind of telekinesis. Now that he has his quirk again, he would probably use it to enhance his throw.

Aizawa isn't going to erase his quirk this time. He's just going to toss the bouncy ball at Midoriya's head while he's busy throwing up and make another dry remark about how that would have killed him in a real situation, just to drive home that he needs to refine his quirk.

Midoriya finally raises his head with a determined look.

He steps forward, drawing back his arm, and Aizawa readies his bouncy ball.

But contrary to his expectation, Midoriya doesn't use his telekinesis. Instead, he seems to pool raw power into a single fingertip that he uses to *smash* the ball into the air at the last possible second.

Midoriya catches the bouncy ball deftly with a smack, not a hint of the violent coughing fit to be seen. His right forefinger is swollen and broken, but the kid doesn't even seem to notice the pain as he curls his hand into a victorious fist.

He turns towards Aizawa and bares his teeth in a grin.

"I'm not dead yet, sensei," he says, brandishing the bouncy ball in his

left hand. And Aizawa didn't expect it from the previously quiet and polite kid, but that grin is downright *savage.*

705.3 meters, the device beeps and informs him.

Aizawa stares at the kid.

But then, he grins right back.

*

Izuku comes home after having his right index finger and left palm healed by Recovery Girl. (He'd also been thoroughly chastised for coming to see her on the *first day of class,* "not that I don't think you're sweet, dear, but this had better not become a pattern.")

Inko is waiting for him with a package wrapped in All Might printed wrapping paper.

"It was in front of our door," she says softly, wringing her hands. "It doesn't say who it's from, so I was worried..."

But Izuku recognizes that wrapping paper.

"It's okay, Mom. I think... I think it's for me."

It's the same wrapping paper he'd used to wrap All Might's thank you gift.

He brings the box into his room and away from Inko, just in case it isn't from who he thinks it is and actually turns out to be dangerous. He opens the box, and an All Might card greets him first. He flips it open to find solid bold writing.

＜Dear young Midoriya,

I was watching the quirk assessment test. Good work, both with your own quirk and with harnessing you-know-what!

This is just a little thumbs-up encouragement, and also congratulations on officially getting through your first day at UA!

Keep up the good work!!＞

The card isn't signed, but Izuku knows *exactly* who it's from.

He smiles, and sets the card carefully on his dresser. He also pulls out the yellow bouncy ball Aizawa had thrown at him (he had asked, and the hero had given him a *look* for a moment that felt like an eternity before allowing him to keep it) from his pocket and puts it beside the card.

Then he shifts his attention to the other contents of the box.

He finds two plushies, both about the size of his head.

One is a pomeranian.

The other is a bunny.

They both have fluffy tails.

And they're both very, very, green.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku: (is going to go easy on the ball pitch)
Aizawa: (singles him out)
Izuku: sensei noticed me; fuck the plan *pulls out OFA*

I've told myself I shouldn't do it, because Aizawa-sensei is a good sensei and shouldn't have favourites, but fuck it, I can't resist anymore. I'm gonna do it.
adds tag: Dadzawa
does the Izuku headbang

Also, it looks like the "extra serving of Bakugo" I hinted at last time is going to have to happen in the next chapter. And believe me, will he be EXTRA.

Thank you for your comments!! Your comments are literally the fuel for this work XD

Because Life Isn't Fair

Chapter Notes

Warning for, uh, Bakugo in general.

I did say there'll be an "extra serving of Bakugo," but it really is... *extra.* Brace yourselves.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Toshinori (as All Might) first officially meets class 1-A on the second day of school. He comes in for their foundational hero studies class, namely the trial of battle, and tells them all to gear up in their hero costumes.

He's is in the process of complimenting everyone's costumes when he chances a glance at Midoriya and promptly does a spit-take.

Young Midoriya's costume is a green jumpsuit with a sturdy white mask covering his lower face, completed by a hood with two appendages sticking straight up.

Some small part of Toshinori recognizes that it must be a tribute to his own tufts of hair.

But the rest of him is caught up at the sight of Midoriya's half-bun poking out of the back of his hood like a fluffy tail and the two appendages waving in the air like ears.

There's no denying it. With his bunny ears and fluffy tail-hair, young Midoriya looks exactly like a green rabbit now.

And judging by his face, he has *no clue.*

This child. Is *priceless.*

Toshinori turns his back to the class and stuffs his fist into his mouth in a desperate attempt to choke down his laughter. His only saving grace is that his students are too busy gawking at UA's extensive facilities to notice that the symbol of peace is shaking pathetically in the corner.

Well, most of his students.

Toshinori notices that young Uraraka has a hand over her mouth and her eyes are practically shining as she stares at Midoriya's costume and hair with something akin to delighted awe.

He has a feeling she's seeing the same thing he is.

*

Izuku watches worriedly as All Might explains the combat simulation. Until just a moment ago All Might had his back turned to the class, a hand over his mouth while shaking uncontrollably. Thankfully no one other than Izuku seems to have noticed, but he's worried that the hero might be overdoing it. The fact that there doesn't seem to be any blood coughed up at least soothes his worry a little.

"Sir!" Iida raises his hand after All Might explains the exercise. "How will we form pairs when we have an odd number of students?"

A hush falls upon the class as everyone is reminded of yesterday. True to his word, Aizawa had expelled the lowest ranking student on the spot, who happened to be Mineta Minoru. It had only been the first day of class so no one really knew each other yet, and what little they *had* seen of Mineta hadn't been all that complimentary, but it was still jarring to see the expulsion of a fellow classmate on the first day.

All Might attempts to expel the gloom by beaming his signature smile.

"You have a point, young Iida! It will simply be that some teams have extra members!"

"That doesn't sound really fair, ribbit."

"Nonsense! Of course it isn't! But life isn't fair, you embryos!"

And it certainly isn't kind, Izuku thinks as he eyes the match ups.

Hero Team: Midoriya & Uraraka vs. Villain Team: Bakugo & Iida

Izuku's eyes unconsciously travel across their assembled classmates to find Bakugo. The other boy is already looking at him, red eyes burning amidst the black of the mask he has over his eyes.

Their eyes meet.

Not a single word passes between them.

*

Izuku is five years old, and he and Inko have just moved away from their old town as if trying to flee the very memory of Hisashi.

They're quietly walking home after getting the groceries when a bright strong voice calls out to them.

"Oh! Hiya, there. I didn't know there was anyone else around here with a munchkin of their own!"

The two Midoriya's turn to find a woman with red eyes and ashy blonde hair smiling at them with her own bag of groceries and miniature replica. Just as any passerby would look at Inko and Izuku and know they're mother and son, Izuku and Inko look at the pair and instantly know that *they* are mother and son.

"Oh, um," Inko starts nervously. "We just moved in today, you see."

The woman beams.

"Welcome, then! I'm Bakugo Mitsuki, and this midget here is my Katsuki," she smiles, pushing down her boy's head in a bow with her hand without even looking at him. The boy looks disgruntled but used to it. There's an easy dynamic there, born through familiarity and affection, something that Inko and Izuku have been too cautious to dare have.

"I'm Mi, Midoriya Inko, and this is Izuku," Inko manages instead. Hisashi is still too fresh in Inko's mind for her to be anything less than a jittery mess, but Mitsuki doesn't seem to mind as she smiles brightly.

"It's a pleasure. Say, do you want to chat for a bit? It's not every day I get to meet someone my age around here. I'll fill you in on all the gossip around town! Katsuki can show Izuku-kun the playground in the meantime."

Inko looks down at Izuku with a lost expression. Izuku meets her eyes, then looks across at Bakugo Mitsuki for a long moment as if sizing her up.

Eventually, Izuku slips his hand out of Inko's and takes a step away.

He smiles up at her.

"It'll be okay, Mom," he says. "Go have fun."

Inko looks so incredibly *lost* for a moment when her son says words that usually a mother should say to her son. But she is saved from having to make a reply when Mitsuki happily claps her hands.

"Alright! Come on then, Inko—can I call you Inko? Katsuki, you take care of Izuku-kun, you hear?"

"Yeah, yeah," the little boy grumps, but then turns to Izuku with a grin. "The others should already be at the playground. Come on!"

Izuku's heart skips a little, and he tentatively smiles back.

For the first time, he thinks he might have a friend.

*

But of course he doesn't, because life isn't fair and it certainly isn't *kind.*

Bakugo turns out to be fond of showing off his flashy quirk, and when Izuku clamps his mouth shut whenever he's asked what his own quirk is, the boy takes to taunting Izuku that he must be a quirkless loser and starts looking down on him.

Izuku bears his taunts and cruel nickname *("Deku")* with silence because it's better than showing his quirk. At this point in life, all five-year-old Izuku knows about his quirk is that he inherited the destructive fire from his father and that it made his mother *scream.*

But when Bakugo starts bullying someone *else* in front of Izuku, he does the only thing he can.

He steps between them.

Bakugo looks astonished at first. Then he laughs with youthful cruelty.

"You playing at hero, *Deku?* You don't even have a quirk!"

“I have a quirk,” Izuku says on reflex.

“Yeah? Then show it!”

Izuku doesn’t.

Because he really, really wishes he *didn’t* have this quirk.

But his silent defiance only seems to enrage Bakugo. The boy practically fumes, and explosions crackle violently out of his palms.

“I said, show it!” he spits, but Izuku is too frozen at the sight of the explosions that look so much like fire to even be aware of Bakugo anymore.

Bakugo seems to instinctively notice that Izuku’s attention isn’t on him.

He rectifies that by running full force at Izuku with palms blazing.

*

Izuku makes it back home to find Inko and Mitsuki seated side by side with a plate of cookies between them. The snacks were probably brought by Mitsuki since neither Izuku or Inko had the concept of food being pleasure yet. The two women are laughing together over something, Mitsuki loud and free with her head thrown back and Inko softly and cautiously from behind her hand.

But she’s still *laughing*.

Izuku stands there frozen, staring at his mother like he’s never seen her before.

Eventually Inko notices him, as she’s more attuned to his silent presence.

“Oh. Welcome back, darling,” she says as she catches sight of him, and she’s *still smiling*.

But then Inko’s eyes widen as she takes in Izuku’s dirtied clothes. A tinge of familiar fear enters those green eyes that had been filled with mirth just a moment ago.

“What... what happened, dear?” Inko asks in a whisper.

Izuku looks at his mother who’s looking at him with fear, and then at the woman who had been able to make her smile and laugh.

Izuku has only ever been able to make his mother worried, afraid, or cry. But Bakugo Mitsuki has managed to make her not only smile but actually *laugh* in just the short time they've been together, like it's easy as breathing.

And as much as it hurts, he realizes then and there that he could never do anything to take that away from her.

So Izuku clasps his hands behind his back to hide the burns and bruises on his arms and plasters a smile on his face.

“I just fell, Mom. Baku—” But no, Izuku realizes with startling intellect for a five-year-old. If he’s going to sell this, he's going to have to do better than that. *“Kacchan* and I were playing in the sandbox. Sorry for the mess.”

It’s instantly apparent that it was the right move.

Inko visibly relaxes, and Mitsuki starts cooing.

“He lets you call him *Kacchan?* That’s so *adorable!”*

Mitsuki begins talking excitedly again with Inko smiling tentatively at her new friend. Izuku quietly backs out and heads to his own room to treat his wounds in privacy.

Izuku had already made a habit of wearing long sleeves because of the numerous scars and wounds Hisashi gave him periodically. But from that moment, he begins wearing long sleeves at all times. Even inside the house. Even in front of Inko.

*

Bakugo continues picking on others to assert himself at the top of their secluded food chain.

Izuku bears the bullying pointed at himself silently, but when Bakugo goes for another target, he steps between them.

He never really fights back. He's never learned *to* fight back. Bakugo reminds Izuku so much of Hisashi and his explosions look so much like violent fire that Izuku pretty much freezes up when confronted with them. He just gets back up and between Bakugo and his would-be victim without protest, without even a cry of pain at the bruises and minor burns. It's nothing compared to Hisashi's abuse, after all.

Izuku's silent defiance somehow seems to enrage Bakugo all the more. But each time Izuku wordlessly faces down his rage and explosions, all he can think is *you have nothing on my father.*

*

Izuku steps between Bakugo and the children he tries to bully time and again. Just like Hisashi stopped going for Inko and started coming straight for Izuku, eventually Bakugo stops trying to bully other children and just singles out Izuku for ridicule and bullying.

And really, as powerful as Bakugo's quirk is, he still has *nothing* on Hisashi.

All Izuku has known before this point is violence, after all, and bullying just pales in comparison.

If this is the price Izuku has to pay so that Inko thinks they're friends and can enjoy her own new friendship with Mitsuki, then he'll put up with it. He'll *gladly* put up with it.

So Izuku never stops following the blonde around dutifully and quietly.

After all, Hisashi had taught him to step between people, to get up no matter how much fear shakes his limbs, to push aside and ignore pain.

But he's never taught him how to run away.

So Izuku stays by Bakugo's side.

*

Izuku is nine, and he keeps three steps behind Bakugo as they both walk home.

Inko has become best friends with Mitsuki, and currently the two have gone out for a dinner date so can't pick them up.

Izuku is happy for his mother because now that Hisashi is gone, not only can she indulge in human contact outside their house but Inko can finally discover the joy of eating what and when she wants with the enthusiastic help of Mitsuki.

Inko has changed so much in the few years since Hisashi's arrest and their move. She's less jittery and nervous, doesn't jump at every single footstep, has filled out more, and actually *smiles.* She still hasn't completely gotten over her pyrophobia like Izuku has managed to, but...

'But of course,' a cruel phantom breathes in Izuku's ear. *'How can she, when you yourself are a living reminder?'*

No, Izuku protests faintly. *I will never use your fire. I will never be like you.*

The phantom laughs. *'You know what they say, boy. Like father, like son.'*

No. I won't, I'll never—

"Will you shut the fuck up, you fucking nerd? Quit your mumbling!" Bakugo snaps, and Izuku clicks his mouth shut.

*

Izuku is in middle school, and this time, instead of stepping between Bakugo and his would-be victim, he steps between a slime villain and Bakugo who is *his* would-be victim.

Later, Bakugo catches Izuku by the scruff of his neck and slams him into a wall.

"What the actual fuck, you quirkless shit?! Deku! Where did you pull that quirk out of?! All this time I tell you to show your quirk, and you only use it *now?!"*

He's referring to how Izuku had *pulled* him out of the slim villain's grasp, Izuku realizes. Of course. Even half suffocating and scared witless, Bakugo is not an idiot. Of course he noticed.

But that doesn't mean Izuku is going to explain his quirk. His fire. Because no matter if Bakugo's smoking hands are near his throat, or he's frothing right in Izuku's face, he still has *nothing* on Hisashi.

"...I never said I was quirkless, Kacchan," is all he ends up saying quietly. He doesn't even flinch at the small explosions that go off near his face. He's long since gotten over his pyrophobia, after all. Bakugo himself had made sure of that.

Bakugo keeps him by his collar, face twisted in rage and frustration and... is that *hurt?*

"No," he finally says. "I guess you didn't."

Bakugo lets go of Izuku as if he's been burned, still looking at Izuku with those unreadable eyes.

"Stop looking down on me Deku, you fucking arrogant *bastard."*

And with that accusation, he turns around without another word.

*

Izuku is fifteen and in UA, going through the quirk assessment test.

Every time he uses his pull and violently coughs up fire into his hand in a desperate attempt to keep it back, he feels two sets of eyes on his back.

One is Aizawa, who probably can't let his glaring weakness slide as a teacher.

The other, though, is Bakugo, who has been glaring murderously at Izuku since Iida's comment about Izuku placing first in the practical exam. Bakugo watches Izuku's casual display of his quirk with almost frightening intensity.

He doesn't say a word or approach Izuku. But his gaze burns almost more than Izuku's fire.

*

Izuku is still fifteen, still in UA, and is now going up against Bakugo in their battle simulation.

He and Uraraka are stationed outside the building the “villains” are holed up in, waiting for the signal to proceed.

For the first time, just stepping in front of Bakugo isn’t going to be enough. Izuku can’t just let him have his way and wait for his rage to burn out, and he can’t depend on the fact that this is only a class activity for Bakugo to hold back. No, for the first time, Izuku is actually going to have to confront Bakugo.

Izuku sighs, lowering his mask from his lower face to let it rest on his collarbone.

“Uraraka,” he calls quietly, and the girl instantly focuses on him. (He had caught her staring at his costume earlier as if transfixed, muttering about bunny ears and tails. But when he had asked if his costume looked weird, she had vehemently denied it. “It’s *perfect,”* she had insisted solemnly with almost frightening intensity. Izuku had no idea what was going on, but he’d been too intimidated to ask.)

“Yeah, Deku?” she smiles, and the way the nickname rolls off her tongue sounds so different from how he’s used to hearing it.

A strange half-smile comes upon Izuku’s face as he thinks of the person who gave him that nickname in the first place.

“Kacchan... I mean, Bakugo is most likely to come after me. I can lead him away from you. Do you think you can find the nuke in the meantime?”

Uraraka looks questioning. “Are you sure?”

Izuku doesn’t know if she’s asking if he’s sure that's the best course of action, or if he’s sure Bakugo will come after him. Whichever it is, though, the answer is yes.

“The worst-case scenario for us is facing off Iida and Bakugo at the same time. Iida’s speed will make both him and the nuke hard to

capture, and Bakugo has raw firepower. Divide and conquer is our best strategy."

And as for whether Bakugo will come after Izuku, well.

Like it or not, Izuku has known the boy for the past decade.

He'll come.

Uraraka doesn't seem to notice Izuku's grim thoughts as she claps and beams.

"Ohh, divide and conquer! That sounds so cool! Alright, I'll find the nuke in no time! Leave it to me!"

Izuku smiles back at her softly.

"Can you tell me more about your quirk? We can work on a plan."

*

The timer is up, and Izuku and Uraraka steal into the building. They part ways as soon as they get in (surprisingly easily, thanks to Uraraka's quirk letting them float in through a window) and Uraraka takes the stairs as Izuku winds around the floor, straining his ears.

Not too long after, he picks up on the sound of footsteps and breathing around the corner. It looks like Bakugo has been looking for him too, probably planning on an ambush.

Unfortunately for him, Izuku has spent his early childhood holding his breath and attuning his entire being to Hisashi so that he could either hide from the man or step between them when he started beating Inko. In terms of experience in this game of cat and mouse, Izuku simply *outclasses* Bakugo.

He doubles around the corridor to find Bakugo waiting to ambush him. He creeps up silently from behind, and then *Izuku* ambushes *him.*

Izuku shoots toward Bakugo with the capture tape in his hands, and Bakugo narrowly avoids getting his legs entangled in the tape by blasting himself into a wall. He curses loudly as he hits the wall *hard,* and Izuku also curses internally. He'd been hoping to take Bakugo out

as quickly and efficiently as possible, but now that the ambush has failed things are bound to get messy.

“DEKUU!!” Bakugo roars as he gets to his feet, as if to prove Izuku’s point.

“Fucking fight me, for once!” he spits. “Fight me with your *quirk!”*

...Izuku would like to avoid that as much as possible, thank you very much.

So when Bakugo rushes at him with his signature right hook, instead of using his quirk Izuku grabs the blonde, flips him over his head, and *throws* him.

But it looks like Bakugo has learned from the ambush, and is ready this time. Even as he goes flying, he uses a blast from his palms to break the fall and come rushing at Izuku again.

“You shitty,” he throws a punch, “arrogant,” aims a roundhouse kick at Izuku’s head, *“bastard,”* he hisses, thrusting both arms forward and firing a blast.

Izuku dodges the blows, slowly inching back and leading Bakugo away from the staircase Uraraka headed to. She hasn’t contacted him yet, so he needs to either capture Bakugo or stall for more time.

So instead of keeping silent, Izuku decides to start talking back.

“I really don’t get it,” he says. “Between you and me, I’d have thought *you* were the arrogant bastard. Why do you insist on calling *me* that?”

It's the most lip Izuku has given Bakugo in all their ten years of acquaintance.

And Bakugo looks so *bewildered* that he outright stops his assault. He stares at Izuku like he can’t even believe what he’s hearing, and that reaction startles Izuku in turn. He’d just been trying to buy Uraraka more time by stalling Bakugo. It *is* the first time he's really talked back to the boy, but he’d never thought what he’d just said would garner such a reaction.

“Why...? What do you even... you don’t even...” Bakugo kind of gapes at him, then starts laughing harshly. He presses the palms of his hands into his eyes.

“Fuck,” he says. *“Fuck.* All this time I’ve been trying to… and you don’t even… *Fuck.”*

Bakugo lowers his hands and glares at Izuku. His eyes are accusing. *Hurt.*

“All these years, you never once deigned to even show me your quirk. And the one time you *do* use it, you use it to *save* me. How the fuck is that *not* looking down on me?!”

He laughs again, a harsh bark that sounds like it hurts.

“And that’s not all. You keep stepping in front of me but never use your quirk, like I’m not even worth it. And the thing is, you never even *look* at me.”

Bakugo is snarling now, raising his right arm and pointing it at Izuku. He hooks a finger into the pin sticking out of the grenade-like support item on his arm.

“Fuck it. I’ll *make* you look at me. I’ll *make* you use your quirk.”

A mad grin takes over Bakugo’s features, and Izuku can only watch frozen with wide eyes.

“Fucking *look* at me, Deku. Look at *me.”*

He pulls the pin.

The blast rocks the entire building.

Izuku barely manages to shake himself out of his shock just in time to dodge behind a corner out of the way of the explosion, though not before his left arm is hit by the blast. But pain has never really bothered him, and he can’t focus on it all the more now.

He really hadn’t been expecting much when he’d asked Bakugo that question. The boy had a grudge against Izuku since they were little seemingly for no reason at all, and Izuku had been too used to Hisashi’s causeless violence that he’d never questioned it when the same came from Bakugo.

But that had been the problem, he realizes. Bakugo had reminded Izuku so much of Hisashi that he’d seamlessly transitioned his mindset from one tormentor to the other. But the thing is, Bakugo isn’t Hisashi. He had never been Hisashi.

Bakugo had taken the fact that Izuku had a quirk but wouldn't use it as an insult, as a way of saying he wasn't even worth it. And of course Izuku didn't mean it like that, but he can understand how Bakugo could have taken it that way.

And then there's the other thing he'd said.

Stop looking down on me, he had said.

And Izuku never meant to, but maybe... maybe he *had.* Because every time he faced down Bakugo's rage and explosions, all he could think had been *you have nothing on my father.*

Bakugo's desperate and almost hurt expression comes to mind again.

***Look** at me. Look at **me**.*

Let it never be said that Bakugo Katsuki is not sharp. He had known, even before Izuku himself, that Izuku wasn't seeing him as he was. Izuku had been seeing Bakugo almost as a substitute Hisashi, and *that* had been why the blonde had always been so mad at him.

And that doesn't change what Bakugo did. It doesn't change the fact that he was a bully, that he was a bad friend, that he was a bad person.

But it does change Izuku's perspective.

After ten years, he finally feels like he understands Bakugo.

And he feels... *sorry.*

Uraraka's voice comes in through his earpiece as Izuku gets up, letting him know that she's found Iida and the nuke. She's almost right above where Izuku is now. But Izuku has more pressing matters at hand at the moment.

No matter what kind of person Bakugo is or was, and no matter whether Izuku meant it or not, the fact still stands that he hurt Bakugo.

And Izuku... well. He's never been able to leave someone in need of help.

"Alright, Kacchan," he calls, stepping out from behind his cover. "You win. I'll fight you."

His hood has been blown away and his left arm has been grazed by the blast, but his mouthpiece is still hanging in place around his neck and resting at his collarbone.

The mask is the one part he deviated from his mother's handmade costume and commissioned for a support item. It's a sturdy white mouthguard with stripes on the side and a midsection with holes, and it goes over the lower half of his face, fully covering his nose and mouth.

The important part is that it's fireproof.

Izuku had hung it around his neck, but now he brings it up in place over his mouth. If he has to breathe out fire, the mouthguard will keep it in even without Izuku having to desperately clamp his hand over his mouth and half smother himself in a desperate attempt to keep the fire from touching anyone else. The mask itself is fireproof, as is Izuku's mouth, so as long as the support item does its job it should allow Izuku to freely spit out fire without fear of it burning anyone.

It's effectively a muzzle that lets Izuku use his pull without having to worry about breathing out fire.

Bakugo needs help, but the kind of help he needs or wants from Izuku isn't hugs or words. No, if Izuku wants to help Bakugo, *this* is what he needs to do.

He spreads his feet in a battle stance and raises one hand towards Bakugo.

"Come on then, Kacchan," he says, baring his teeth in a grin behind his muzzle. "I won't bite."

Bakugo looks surprised, like he didn't think he'd actually be able to get Izuku to fight him. But then his entire face *lights up.*

"Finally."

*

The fight that follows is surprisingly short considering how heavily

loaded it is.

Izuku *pulls,* and Bakugo is yanked towards him with a yelp that turns into a delighted (and half-crazed, if you ask Izuku) laugh. He grins while bringing around his right palm mid-air, but Izuku has been on the receiving end of that particular move too many times to fall for it. He dodges around the blast, getting behind Bakugo.

Pressure from his quirk builds up, but this time, Izuku readily spits out the fire pooling in his mouth.

He lets out the flame, and the coughs hack through his body. Tendrils of smoke rise out of the holes in the midsection of his mouthguard, but not a flicker of fire is seen outside it.

But the most important thing about this mask is that it keeps the fire in without Izuku having to force it back with his own hands. In other words, it frees up both his hands.

Bakugo is already turning to face him, but even as his body is shaking from the coughs that wrack it Izuku grabs the collar on Bakugo's costume with both hands and swings him around into a wall. Even while faceplanting, Bakugo shows his remarkable battle sense and manages to aim a palm behind his back and blast Izuku.

He hisses, forced to retreat. But he *pulls* Bakugo after him, catching the blonde in his arms in a parody of a hug.

The only thing is, Izuku's hands are holding the capture tape.

"What the fu—?!"

Bakugo doesn't even get to finish his sentence as Izuku deftly wraps the capture tape over most of his body and his lower face, effectively trapping his arms and legs and gagging his mouth. Izuku has idolized Eraserhead for two thirds of his life, after all. As a hardcore fanboy, he'd, ah, *practiced* his hero's favoured weapon a little.

"Villain Bakugo, captured," a mechanical voice rings out.

Bakugo squirms, but the capture tape holds strong. Izuku coughs up some fire and grins down at Bakugo, though he probably can't see it through the mask that's still covering his face.

The glare Bakugo gives him is less murderous and more resigned.

It’s progress.

“Uraraka,” Izuku calls. “Are you still in the same place?”

“Deku!” a relieved voice comes over his earpiece. “Oh thank god, yes, but Iida keeps moving the nuke out of my grasp! I don’t know what to do, and we're running out of time!”

Izuku looks up at the ceiling. He could join Uraraka against Iida, as was his original plan, but he's not sure if he'll be able to use his pull against Iida's speed. And there's not enough time for trial and error. So...

“Keep close to a wall and tell me where Iida is. When you see the signal, float yourself and go for the nuke.”

“What’s the signal?”

“You’ll know it when you see it.”

Izuku then proceeds to drag Bakugo to a corner of the room. Being tied up like a cocoon, there’s nothing Bakugo can do about it except futilely kicking his legs. Izuku sets them in position, mindful of the stream of Uraraka's voice as she details Iida's position for him. When Uraraka informs him that Iida has taken to the opposite wall from her, Izuku takes Bakugo’s left arm and points it to the middle of the ceiling where neither of them will be caught directly in the blast.

The grenade launcher in Bakugo’s right arm has already been used. But the one on his left is still intact and full of his explosive sweat.

Bakugo’s eyes widen in realization and outrage. Izuku grins again.

“Sorry, Kacchan. But if you didn’t want me to take advantage of it, you shouldn’t have shown it to me in the first place.”

He hooks his finger in, and pulls out the pin.

The ceiling is blasted apart, and Izuku thinks he hears a startled yell from Iida. He waits a moment more, and that mechanical voice calls out again.

“Nuke retrieved. Winner: Hero team.”

*

Izuku is sent to Recovery Girl to get his left arm patched up, even though in his opinion it's not anything worth fussing over. Recovery Girl seems to disagree, though, and tuts at him disapprovingly.

"Didn't I tell you not to make this a pattern? It's only the second day of school, and already I've seen you three times including the entrance exam!"

She continues fussing over him as she treats the burns and blisters Bakugo's blast left on him. But as she peels away more of the sleeve of his tattered costume, the woman stills.

"...These are some old scars," she says quietly.

Izuku looks down to see what she's talking about, then has to hide a wince.

There was a reason he always wears long sleeves.

"Ah, um. Yes," he says awkwardly, pointedly avoiding the questioning eyes boring into the side of his face. He knows the old, jagged, crisscrossing scars on his forearms aren't pretty. But he's not about to tell her that Hisashi had gone through a phase where he was particularly... *fond* of jackknives.

At least she hasn't taken a look at his back yet.

There's an awkward moment as Recovery Girl scrutinizes Izuku with questioning and heavily loaded eyes, while Izuku does his best to avoid meeting her gaze and fidgets.

Eventually, Recovery Girl ends their one-sided staring contest with a resigned sigh.

"Fine. Heaven knows you teenagers can be stubborn as mules. But from now on, if you get hurt in any way, you come to me and don't just try to tend to it yourself like these," she lightly taps the web of scars. "You hear, young man?"

Izuku ducks his head. Recovery Girl is a professional; she seems to have deduced just from seeing the way his scars formed that his young self had tried to awkwardly treat the wounds himself instead of getting proper medical attention.

“Yes ma’am,” he dutifully whispers.

He’s soon let off with a firm kiss on his cheek. But even as he leaves, Izuku still feels her gaze weigh heavily on his back.

*

When Izuku gets back to class, his classmates flock toward him like excited puppies.

“Oh hey, Midoriya’s back! Man, that was some awesome stuff back there! We couldn’t hear what you guys were saying, but that was heated!”

“It was so cool how you reverse ambushed Bakugo! And how you used his own attack to win! Divine retribution!”

“The first match was so intense it got the rest of us all fired up! I guess that’s to be expected since you two placed first and second in the practical exam!”

“Mm, and the way you were so quick with the capture tape was really impressive too, ribbit. It almost looked like how Aizawa-sensei used his capture weapon yesterday.”

Izuku hides a wince at that last startlingly accurate observation from Asui, or Tsuyu as she insists. They go around making introductions until Uraraka approaches him a little nervously.

“Hey Deku. I’m not sure if this is the right thing to do, but, um, that Bakugo guy asked... well, *told* us to tell you that he’d be waiting for you outside.”

Izuku blinks.

Huh. That’s new.

Uraraka, bless her kind soul, looks worried for him.

“Are you sure it’ll be okay? It looked like he wasn’t really nice to you...”

But Izuku smiles at her.

“Thank you, Uraraka. But I think I’ll be alright.”

*

“Deku!”

Izuku turns to find Bakugo straightening up from the wall he’d been leaning on and approaching him. He has his bag slung over one shoulder, shoulders slouched, his hands in his pockets, and that signature scowl on his face. But Izuku knows Bakugo well enough to recognize that the expression on his face is nowhere near actual anger.

He looks... conflicted. Like he's received a present only to be told he can’t open it until Christmas.

“I’ve been trying to get you to use your quirk since we were five,” he begins. “And I *finally did,* but even then you only used part of it. You didn’t use that fire that I *know* you have.”

And Izuku’s heart leaps to his throat. His fire. How does Bakugo know about that? Even when using his pull he’d kept it smouldered so well that even All Might found out about it only after Izuku told him—

Oh. Of course. Bakugo must have seen it when he first saw Izuku’s pull.

Back when Izuku had faced the slime villain, he hadn’t yet thought to breathe fire out of his mouth so he’d had to risk pushing out a bit of flame in his hand. And Bakugo had been right behind him.

Of *course* Bakugo had to be the one to see his fire. Of *course* it had to be the one person who wouldn’t rest until he got what he wanted out of Izuku.

Because life isn’t fair, and it certainly isn’t *kind.*

Bakugo continues, running a hand over his face.

“And even so, you still beat me. And then there’s that ice guy, and that ponytail bitch too. Just... shit.”

He looks up and meets Izuku’s gaze.

“But *fuck* them, and fuck you too. I’m not going to lose to them. And I’ll make you use *all* your quirk, and beat you at your best. I’m gonna be number one, you hear?!”

Then he stalks off, but his shoulders aren’t as bunched up as they usually are.

Izuku watches his—childhood friend? Can he call him that?—walk away silently. For the first time in ten years, he feels like he understands Bakugo.

Being a bad person is not the same thing as being a villain.

And sharing a few traits does not make Bakugo into Hisashi.

“Kacchan,” he calls out. Bakugo pauses his steps to look over his shoulder. Izuku gives him a half-smile.

“I’m *not* going to use fire,” Bakugo bristles at that, but Izuku continues on, “but that has nothing to do with looking down on you. I never meant to. And... I’m sorry for not seeing you as you are.”

Bakugo looks at Izuku for a long moment at that apology. Then he scoffs and turns back around, though there's something about his posture that's even more relaxed and lighter than before.

“Whatever. I’ll *make* you use it. And you’d better keep looking at *me,* you arrogant bastard.”

The corner of Izuku’s mouth quirks up slightly at the insult.

I’ll make you use it, he’d said.

Good luck with that.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku’s mask/mouthguard looks pretty much the same as the one he’ll get later on in canon.

In this AU, Izuku has been seeing Bakugo as a mini-Hisashi, but still stayed with him A) for Inko's sake, who was friends with momma Bakugo, and B) because he's never learned that it's okay to avoid things that hurt him.
Meanwhile, Bakugo has been desperately trying to get Izuku to

notice and acknowledge him for the past ten years in the only way he knows how.
So while the end result (Bakugo bullying Izuku and Izuku still following him around) may look similar to canon, their positions are actually completely reversed. Here, it's Bakugo who was always chasing Izuku's shadow.
Talk about a dysfunctional relationship.

And yes, I got rid of Mineta. As much as Aizawa likes his logical ruses, it's also true that he has the highest expulsion rate among the UA staff. I'm pretty sure he very much intended to keep his word, except Izuku managed to impress him enough in canon. I don't see Mineta doing that, at least not this early in the series, so... Goodbye, Grape Juice. You will not be missed.
(Now the room next to Izuku's is empty. I CAN MOVE TODOROKI IN.)
(Oh god, why is it so far away, I want to write the dorm shenanigans so bad)

Next up: USJ... (dun dun DUN)
Oh my, our baby boy is gonna have to watch both his heroes get beaten to a pulp...
I AM SO EXCITED
does the Izuku headbang

And It Certainly Isn't Kind

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After classes have let out, Aizawa is looking over the written report of class 1-A's trial of battle that All Might oversaw earlier that day. He's doing his best to ignore All Might's... *All Mightness* sprinkled throughout the report *("and then young Midoriya pulls an Eraserhead on young Bakugo and binds him with the capture tape in a truly stunning move!")* when the intercom rings.

"Aizawa," he says as he picks it up, almost glad for the distraction.

"This is Recovery Girl," the elderly nurse's voice comes over the line. "I need to talk to you about one of your students, Midoriya Izuku."

Of course she does, and of course it's him. Midoriya has been the only one in Aizawa's class to have seen the nurse, after all, both yesterday *and* today. No matter how bright and well-intentioned he may be, Aizawa has the creeping suspicion that this one's going to be a problem child.

He sighs. "How bad was it this time?"

"A first-degree burn, blisters, cuts, and bruises. But that's not the reason I'm calling."

And oh, does *that* sound promising.

"I noticed something while treating him today, so I pulled out his student file. It looks like he requested long sleeves on all his uniforms, including the P.E. and summer uniforms. But today he came in with half the left sleeve of his costume tattered, so I got a look at his left forearm, at least. Normally I wouldn't break patient confidentiality, but these are children, students, and we are their teachers. *You* are *his* teacher, so I think you should know this."

She pauses, and Aizawa feels as if his breath stills with her.

"Aizawa, he had scars *all over* his arm."

The breath he'd held comes out in a low hiss.

Recovery Girl continues.

“They were old. I’d say at least five, maybe even over ten years old. Treated by an amateur, too, and he didn’t deny it when I guessed he’d treated it himself instead of getting proper medical attention. And they’re not just from ordinary scrapes. Those were *knife marks.* They were focused on the outside of his forearms, suggesting he’d been trying to shield himself from someone larger wielding a knife. And Aizawa,” Recovery Girl pauses once more, and Aizawa feels his breath catch in his throat again.

“That was just his left forearm. I didn’t even get to see the entire arm, let alone the rest of his body. And I… I fear what I might find.”

Silence falls between them.

Aizawa pictures Midoriya in his mind. He remembers how the kid had immediately recognized him, not as a teacher, but as the hero Eraserhead. He recalls how he’d looked at Aizawa as if he’d hung the moon. How he hadn’t even flinched at pain and even smiled through it, as if far too used to pain for one shattered finger to bother him.

And now the scars.

There’s one vague yet glaringly obvious answer that links all those things together.

“…Did he say how he was scarred?”

The nurse sighs at Aizawa’s quiet question.

“No. I wouldn’t have been as worried if he had.”

Aizawa hides a grimace in the folds of his capture weapon. Yeah, he’d thought the kid wouldn’t talk. Even from what little Aizawa has seen of Midoriya Izuku, he can tell he’s not the type of person that goes around showing off his wounds and scars. Both literal and figurative.

“…I’ll keep an eye out and see what I can do. Thank you for telling me,” Aizawa finally ends up saying.

“Of course,” Recovery Girl replies. “It’s our duty to look after our students, after all. …Oh, and I’ll be telling this to All Might too, just so you know.”

Aizawa’s eyebrow quirks up.

Aizawa himself has been teaching and dealing with teenagers long enough to know that this kind of problem—a student perhaps having been a victim of a villain activity, the possibility of abuse, probably lingering trauma—has to be treated with care and caution least they worsen the situation. Children are malleable, after all. But All Might lacks the experience in teaching to know to be delicate instead of his usual loud and bright self.

“Don’t worry,” Recovery Girl assures, as if picking up on his unease. “I’ll talk to him, tell him to approach this carefully. And he *needs* to know this.”

Well, then.

And it’s not like Aizawa hasn’t suspected there might be something between his problem child and the number one hero. It’s clear that All Might is trying his best to stay unbiased and fair, but he’s the type of person who wears their heart on their sleeve, for better or worse. His fondness for Midoriya is painfully obvious.

And as for Midoriya, well. His adoration for All Might is only rivalled by that for Aizawa himself.

Which Aizawa can’t afford to ignore anymore.

He bids a subdued farewell to Recovery Girl and hangs up.

Aizawa stares blankly at the phone for a long moment. Then he slowly reaches out a hand to pick up the receiver again. He punches in a line of numbers he hasn’t called in a long time.

“This is Eraserhead,” he says as soon as the line is picked up, not even pausing for a greeting. “I need a favour. Every arrest, scuffle, or incident I was a part of from the past ten to five years. I need a file on every single one as soon as possible.”

He pauses.

“Especially anything that’s related to a child.”

*

Izuku is confused.

When Aizawa is in the vicinity, it's only natural for Izuku's attention to zoom in and focus on his hero. He can't help it. He's already gone through this phase with All Might too. Though months of exposition has at least toned down the sheer starstruck awe that surfaces in the presence of the number one hero, it's yet to wear off for his other hero.

But the confusing thing is, *Aizawa* is looking at *Izuku* too, now.

It's not obvious. It's subtle, and even Izuku might not have noticed it if he himself hadn't already been hyper-aware of Aizawa. But no matter how secretive Aizawa is about it, it's undeniable that he *does.*

It probably says something about Izuku that at the realization that his hero is watching him, his heart jumps with fear rather than joy.

His mind races.

Why? What did he do to single himself out? Izuku did get elected as class president only to promptly hand over the position to Iida, but Aizawa's scrutiny had begun even before that incident. Maybe it had something to do with something that happened in the trial of battle? But then, wouldn't he have said something when he was giving them feedback?

Then what? Why?

...Could it... could it be that he's made the connection between Izuku and Hisashi...?

No, Izuku tells himself forcefully. He *can't* have. It's not possible. Hisashi may have been the domineering shadow looming over Izuku's life, but to Aizawa he has only ever been one of the many villains Eraserhead took down. And that was a full *decade* ago. No matter how good Aizawa's memory may be, there's just *no way* he can possibly remember Hisashi.

That's what Izuku tells himself as he gets on the bus for their trial of rescue and Aizawa's gaze lingers on him for a moment too long.

It's not that he hasn't thought (imagined) (dreamed) about telling Eraserhead that he'd saved him and his mother and thanking the hero. Of *course* he has. But now that he's Izuku's homeroom teacher, thing's aren't as simple as that.

Izuku is worried that if he tells Aizawa, he'll remember Hisashi. That

he'll remember how Hisashi had breathed fire, and look at how Izuku holds back the flames in his mouth.

Izuku is worried (he's *terrified shitless)* that Aizawa will think he's like his father.

He fingers his mouthguard nervously.

Thankfully, his unease is mostly dispelled by the rowdy cheer of his classmates and the novelty of Bakugo being teased. Izuku smiles and laughs with his friends (friends, he actually has *friends* now) during the bus ride, and by the time they arrive at their destination (an actual USJ) Izuku is calmed down enough to get properly excited at the sight of the space hero No. Thirteen and go into fan-mode side by side with Uraraka.

His good mood is brought down a notch when he notices Thirteen subtly signalling to Aizawa that All Might is out of time and won't be joining them, but his attention is soon grasped by the space hero's speech.

"My quirk is called 'Black Hole.' No matter what material may get sucked into its vortex, I'm afraid it will turn into dust. I use this to remove wreckage and save people from disasters. However... it is also a power that can easily be used to kill people." The hero pauses. "And in that way, it is no different from the quirks of everyone else here."

At those words, a shiver goes through Izuku.

His back *burns.*

Thirteen continues talking about quirks in present-day society, how one misstep is all it takes to accidentally kill someone. Izuku listens with his left fist clenched, nails digging into his palm. Recovery Girl has healed all the burns on his palm, but for some reason, it still itches.

If he hadn't blocked the flames with his own hand, then someone else may have suffered for it.

But then, Thirteen's grim speech takes a turn.

"In this lesson, we'll be studying how to use those quirks for the sake of human life!"

Izuku's fist unconsciously unclenches.

“Your quirks emphatically do not exist to hurt others. Please leave this exercise having fully understood that your quirks exist to help people!”

His classmates burst into enthusiastic applause as Thirteen takes a bow. But all Izuku can do is stare at the hero.

He already knows, of course, the duality of quirks. There are countless villains with strength enhancement quirks, but All Might used his to become the number one hero. Even Endeavor, the number two hero, has a fire quirk yet uses it not for villainy but heroism.

But the thing is, Izuku has never been able to think of his fire in the same way.

Izuku's fire is his father's, and he has seen it hurt Inko too many times, has felt it burn *himself* too many times to dare think of it as anything other than pain and destruction. It has only ever hurt. It can't possibly protect.

His fire has been tainted even before it was ever his.

But for some reason, Thirteen’s words jostle something inside him.

Before he can think more about it, though, he hears Aizawa shout out in a panicked voice he’s never heard from the usually calm hero.

“Keep together and don’t move!” he barks suddenly. “No. Thirteen! Protect the students!”

His classmates are mostly confused, but Izuku’s blood runs cold. Because he *knows* Eraserhead, and he *knows* the hero wouldn’t be acting this way for anything less than a mortal crisis.

“Stay back!” Izuku warns as he flings an arm in front of Kirishima, who’d been trying to step closer and get a better view of the people suddenly emerging in the square down below them. Aizawa’s gaze briefly flickers to Izuku, and he thinks he sees approval and gratitude underneath the tension in his gaze before the man fixes his goggles over his eyes and turns to the people spilling out onto the plaza.

“Midoriya’s right. Don’t move! Those... are villains!”

As if to prove this, a misty black man muses after looking over them.

“Eraserhead and No. Thirteen... According to the teacher’s curriculum

we procured yesterday, All Might was supposed to be here and yet…"

And doesn't *that* sound ominous.

A thin man with severed hands clinging all over his body throws his head back.

"Where is he… We went through all this trouble and rustled up so many to bring along. You can't tell me All Might… the symbol of peace… isn't here."

He cocks his head to one side.

"I wonder if he'll show up if we kill the kids?"

A shock seems to go through the entire class as they finally realize what they're facing.

Villains.

Some panic, while some speculate about one of the villains jamming the intruder alarm sensors. Through it all, Aizawa steps forward with his back to his class.

"Thirteen, do the evacuation procedure and try calling the school!" he instructs as he grasps the capture weapon around his shoulders.

"Eraser— I mean, sensei?! You're not going to fight them all alone, are you?!" Izuku calls in alarm. Because he *knows* Eraserhead, and *knows* that his fighting style isn't suited for group combat like this.

But the hero—*his* hero—just glances back at him with a tiny quirk of a smile that's mostly hidden in the folds of his capture weapon.

"A hero always has more than one trick up their sleeve."

And with that, he turns away and launches himself into the midst of the villains.

Aizawa… no, Eraserhead proceeds to decimate their ranks, erasing quirks and using his formidable hand to hand combat and capture weapon on any he can't.

Some of his classmates breathe a sigh of relief, but Izuku is still rooted to the spot and has his heart in his throat. Because he knows that this isn't Eraserhead's forte. And Izuku can't even tell anyone how much danger their teacher is actually in, because as much as he understands

just how dangerous his situation is, Izuku also understands exactly why he'd still taken the risk.

The hero must have purposefully thrown himself into the fray in order to set them at ease. And Izuku can't disrespect that by calling out his ruse and throwing everyone into worry and panic.

Izuku is the only one who knows. Izuku is the only one who worries and panics right now.

"Come on, Midoriya!" Iida calls. "Let's leave it to Aizawa-sensei and evacuate!"

Izuku grinds his teeth. Iida has a point. If they can get out and call for reinforcements, then Aizawa will have a better chance. So he forces himself to turn away from the hero.

But of course life isn't fair, and *it certainly isn't kind.*

"I'm afraid I can't allow that," a deceptively polite voice rings out as black mist spreads out before the class, blocking the nearest exit.

"Greetings," the villain says demurely. "We are the League of Villains. I apologize for the intrusion, but we took it upon ourselves to enter UA academy in order to engage All Might, the beacon of hope. We were wondering if we may be allowed to extinguish it, you see."

And Izuku's blood runs *cold.*

Not only do they already have Eraserhead in a tight spot, but they want to kill All Might.

They want to kill All Might.

It feels like the worst nightmare. And it only *worsens* when Bakugo and Kirishima rush at the villain.

Izuku *pulls* them back in turn, having noticed Thirteen flip open the casing on their finger. With the students out of the way, Thirteen is free to aim their black hole on the warp villain. But even as Izuku smothers the flames that swell up in his mouth against his left palm, he watches in horror as the villain opens a warp gate behind Thirteen, making their own quirk turn against them. The eyes reflected on Thirteen's helmet are wide with surprise and horror.

Izuku knows that feeling only too well.

“No!” he shouts desperately, reaching to pull Thirteen out of the loop. But before he can, the villain seems to deem Thirteen incapacitated enough that he removes the warp gates on his own volition, dropping Thirteen to the ground.

And this time, he turns his attention to the class.

“Run!” someone shouts as the black mist envelopes them.

Izuku grabs Asui who’s the closest to him and *pulls* them to the other side, just narrowly escaping the dark grasp of the mist. He frantically turns around as soon as they tumble to the ground. Iida and Shoji seem to have been able to grab a few people each, including Thirteen. But most of his classmates are missing.

I wonder if he’ll show up if we kill the kids? the villain’s words come back to Izuku. He pales.

“The others...” he whispers, almost gasps as he smothers fire in his mouth.

“We’re scattered and in disarray,” Shoji tells him, his many arms spread wide with multiple ears and eyes swivelling on their ends. “But we’re all still within the facility.”

A choked breath of relief leaves Izuku’s mouth.

As soon as the instant panic leaves him, Izuku’s mind goes into overdrive.

Stupid, idiotic, *useless.* He should have been more alert, he should have pushed through the backlash and pulled Thirteen out of the way instead of being busy trying to swallow down the flames.

You’re going to have to figure out a way around your limits, he recalls Aizawa saying on the first day of school, *before they get you killed.*

Worse, before they get *someone else* killed.

Izuku grits his teeth. He can’t afford to wallow in self-disgust now. With Aizawa fighting in the plaza down below and Thirteen injured, they have no guiding figure. It’s up to them.

“Iida,” he calls tightly, his hand lifting up the mouthguard from his collarbone and settling it over his face, his eyes never leaving the villain. “Iida, I’ll hold off the warp villain. When you see your chance,

run. Go get help."

Because now more than ever, help is what they need. Thirteen needs medical attention. Their classmates may need saving. Eraserhead needs reinforcement.

But Iida looks to Izuku with an almost lost expression.

In a startling moment of clarity, Izuku *understands.* The earliest memories he himself has are those of fear, pain, and destruction. This means that when faced with malicious intent, he doesn't freeze up and panic because he's used to it. Because to him, it's nothing new. But his classmates are different. They haven't grown up with a budding villain controlling their lives, they haven't tiptoed through their childhood with bated breath, they haven't known constant pain or fear, they... they're *normal.* And just like normal children, they're at loss now that they've lost their teachers and are faced with a real threat.

Izuku sweeps a glance over his remaining classmates. It's only been a few seconds since Thirteen collapsed and Izuku instructed Iida. But they're all looking at him, looking *to* him, because they instinctively feel like he's the only one who's even remotely calm in this situation.

And of course he isn't. Of course he isn't calm. Of course he's just as terrified as every one of them. But just like Aizawa jumped to battle the villains for the sake of putting their minds at ease, Izuku can keep up a front for them too.

He sets his mouth in a determined line and turns his eyes to Iida.

"I know you don't like it. But Iida, you aren't running away, you're running to get help. And that's something only you can do, class president."

Their eyes meet. Izuku drills all the sincerity, conviction, and faith he can into Iida through his gaze.

"It's like Thirteen said. *Use your quirk to save others."*

Iida seems to hesitate for one more moment before steeling himself.

"Understood!" he shouts as he readies himself and revs his engines, even though it looks like the very thought of leaving his classmates behind physically pains him.

The warp villain tuts in false sympathy.

“You may still be just children, but I’m still surprised you spout all your plans in front of me.”

Izuku bares his teeth in a grin behind his mask.

“It doesn’t matter if you hear. You won't be able to stop Iida because you’ll be too busy with me.”

“No,” Uraraka says as she steps up next to him along with all his other classmates that are here. They look shaken and scared, but also determined. “You’ll be too busy with *us.”*

Izuku looks at them, surprised, but then his grin becomes more genuine.

*

“Asui! Try to capture him!” Izuku calls out as he dodges a warp gate forming under him and Shoji envelops another that opens right behind Iida. Asui doesn’t even pause to quip her usual “call me Tsuyu” before she whips out her tongue. Sero joins in with his tape, but both that and Asui’s tongue pass through the villain’s mist-like body.

The villain chuckles as if amused. He didn’t even bother to get out of the way.

Izuku’s mind is in overdrive.

Sero and Asui are their only long-range fighters at the moment. Anyone else would have to get close and risk being hurt. Except it looks like even if they do get close, they won’t be able to have any effect.

But... if the villain is completely invulnerable, why did he redirect Thirteen’s black hole away from himself? Why not just stand there and mock them, like he’s doing to them now?

He must have a true body in there somewhere.

Izuku grasps out with his quirk.

He can only pull corporeal things. But there has to be at least some substance to the mist villain. Like that suspicious piece of armour.

He grabs it, and *pulls.*

The villains come *flying* towards him with unbelievable speed. Izuku's startled yelp is mixed with the villain's own surprised gasp. Izuku barely manages to jump out of the way and sidestep the villain, making him shoot past and tumble into the ground behind.

A moment of silence settles on them, only broken as Izuku coughs up fire into his mouthguard and the villain slowly rises to his feet with narrowed eyes.

"...What did you just do?" he asks, his false politeness chipping away.

Understanding dawns on Izuku, and the bare bones of a plan forms in his mind.

Even as flames lick his lips, Izuku bares his teeth in a grin.

The lighter something is, the easier it is for him to pull. The mist villain seems to be mostly incorporeal, making most physical attacks useless against him. But that also makes him very, very light.

Which only means that Izuku can toss him around like a rag doll.

He *pulls* again, and this time is prepared to jump out of the way as the villain goes flying past him. Before he even touches the other side, he pulls *again,* probably giving the villain whiplash as he's forced to change his direction mid-flight. The villain sputters, outraged, and wisps of black mist start forming around him but he seems too disoriented to properly open a gate. And Izuku *pulls* him away from his pitiful attempt at escape.

Izuku feels like a matador, luring the bull towards him only to release the pull and step out of the way at the last moment so the villain goes soaring past him instead of crashing into him. It's just as deadly a game as a real bullfight. He can only pull things towards him, after all, so if he's even a moment too late to relinquish the pull and jump aside he'll be sent sprawling along with the villain. But he can't afford to let up and give the villain time to open a warp gate either.

"Iida! Go!" Sato shouts. Izuku is too focused to be able to spare even a glance at his friends, and everyone can tell that every moment is costing him.

Iida shakes off his shock and takes off running, making it through the doors just before Izuku hits his limit and can't keep pulling

successively anymore. He loses control of the pull halfway through dragging the warp villain across the enclosure.

The backlash from pulling consecutively hits *hard.*

He doubles over, retching into his mask as the fire roars out of his throat with vengeance. He tries to clamp down on the fire, put a tight lid on it, make it as small as possible. His mask is fireproof, but he'd been warned that it can only take so much heat before its functions start breaking down. And Izuku can't afford to lose his mouthguard now. So he forces the fire roaring to push out of him as small as possible. It feels like trying to stop a crack in a dam with his bare hands.

He's doubled over from the force of the fire trying to push out of him, and him trying to push it down. Eventually he's forced to his knees, then has to drop to all fours as he gasps and chokes on mouthfuls of fire. Smoke gushes out of the holes in his mask, almost clouding his vision.

It's worse than when he'd pulled the zero point robot, worse than the time he'd tried to side jump in the quirk assessment test. Izuku had pushed himself to the limit in a desperate attempt to buy Iida time, and now he's paying the price.

"Deku!" Uraraka calls, approaching with a worried look on her face. But soon her expression turns to horror. *"Deku!"*

"Midoriya!"

Izuku just barely manages to lift his head to see the warp villain swoop down in front of him. The slits of light that are his eyes are narrowed dangerously, and his previously amiable voice is a furious hiss now.

Oh. Oh *shit.*

"That's *quite enough* with you, *boy."*

And black mist bursts out from him, enveloping them both.

The alarmed shouts of his classmates fade away as Izuku is rushed through the portal. He lands heavily on the other side, disoriented for a moment as he scrambles to his feet.

"Hm...? What's this, Kurogiri?"

Izuku turns at the bland, almost *bored* voice to find the villain with hands all over him.

“Shigaraki Tomura,” the warp villain—Kurogiri?—says, and his voice shows clear deference. “No. Thirteen is incapacitated, but *this boy,”* he spits out in Izuku’s direction, “distracted me enough to allow one of the students to escape the facility.”

The villain... Shigaraki stills for a moment before starting to furiously scratch his own neck.

“Huh...? Huhhh? Kurogiri, if you can’t be a proper warp gate... now dozens of pros will come... then it’s game over for us. Game over.”

He pauses, then turns his head towards Izuku who’s been watching him warily.

“But before we go... maybe I can squeeze in a bonus match? I’ve never seen Kurogiri so rankled up. You sure must have done *something* to get this unflappable guy like this. Hey, won’t you tell me what you did? I hope you’re at least more fun than your teacher...”

Shigaraki trails off with a meaningful sideways glance. Izuku risks taking his eyes off the villain for a moment to steal a glance in the direction.

But once he looks, he can’t look away.

A giant, hulking black villain with popping eyes and an exposed brain is crouched on top of Aizawa.

A bruised, bleeding, *broken* Aizawa.

Izuku’s whole world stills.

“Eraserhead?” slips out in a disbelieving whisper. (Because somewhere in the back of Izuku’s mind, Aizawa is still his hero before he is his sensei.)

Aizawa doesn’t even stir.

“Yeah. Eraserhead didn’t even make a proper toy for Nomu. I hope you’ll at least last longer—”

Shigaraki keeps droning on about something, but Izuku isn’t even listening.

Eraserhead is a hero. His hero. He *saved* Izuku and Inko. In Izuku's subconscious, he's on par with All Might.

But when Izuku looks at him now, the image of his broken and beaten mother overlaps his hero.

And that. He can't. Just. *No.*

Izuku hurls himself at Aizawa and the Nomu, ignoring Shigaraki's indignant protest. He *pulls* at the villain because he can't pull Aizawa, not in that condition, not with arms bent in strange angles and blood pooling around him—

But the Nomu doesn't even budge.

A shocked sound escapes Izuku. The Nomu is big, sure, but it should still be lighter than the robots Izuku had been flinging around with the help of One For All powering up his pull. Then... does that mean the Nomu is resisting with sheer *strength?*

Izuku's mind goes in overdrive. In the span of the heartbeat, a thousand thoughts race through his mind.

His pull doesn't work on the Nomu. But he can't afford to use One For All and break his limbs because even with the Nomu gone, there's still Shigaraki and Kurogiri and who knows how many more villains.

That leaves only one option.

But—but he *can't.*

Izuku swore to himself, to his mother, to the laughing memory of his father that he would never use his fire. He especially doesn't want Aizawa to see even a flicker of flames coming out of him, lest the hero is reminded of Hisashi.

But that's not the reason. It's not that Izuku won't break his oath for Aizawa. He would *burn* it, burn *himself* a thousand times if it means he can save his hero. But the thing is, this fire he has isn't the kind of power that can save anyone. It only hurts and destroys. It's tainted.

It's a quirk that can't save anyone.

But then, Thirteen's words come back to him.

Your quirks emphatically do not exist to hurt others. Please leave this exercise having fully understood that your quirks exist to help people!

The words he himself spoke to Iida come back to him.

Use your quirk to save others.

...Izuku's fire has only ever destroyed what he held dear. It made his mother scream, it made his father laugh, and it burned, burned, *burned* him.

But...

Can destruction lead to salvation?

The backlash from trying to pull the Nomu is building up, the fire in him surging upwards and howling to be set free, trying to push out. Still, he hesitates.

"Man, it's not polite to ignore people when they're talking to you, you know?" Shigaraki drawls. "Nomu, bash his head."

The Nomu lifts Aizawa's bloodied head by his hair and smashes it back into the ground.

And at that, Izuku *snaps.*

All his life, Izuku has been pushed. He has been pushed away by his mother when she locked him in the broom cupboard. He has been pushed down by his father every time Hisashi beat him. He has been pushed around by Bakugo for ten years.

He's been pushed away, pushed down, and pushed around.

For the first time in his life, Izuku *pushes back.*

Chapter End Notes

Can I just point out that Aizawa unconsciously called Izuku "his problem child"
HIS problem child
Aizawa is already such a Dadzawa
Izuku headbang

Yes, Izuku, erase (ha, pun there) and smash (double pun) the memory of your biological father with the love and care of your adoptive dads!!

Turned Tables

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The students left near the entrance of the USJ are in disarray. With no teacher, no leader, no *Midoriya,* no one has any idea what to do.

“No. Thirteen is still breathing, but they’re not responding to me!” Ashido calls from the hero’s side with tears in her eyes.

Sero looks around nervously with Sato.

“The warp guy isn’t here anymore. Should... should we evacuate? Or should we try to find the others?”

“I don’t— I don’t *know!”*

Deku would, a small voice whispers in Uraraka’s mind.

But he’s not here, another voice furiously snaps back.

Uraraka bites her lip to keep in a sob.

Ever since the teachers have been out of commission, Midoriya had been guiding them, whether he knew it or not. Everyone followed his lead without question, even all the usually independent or headstrong people. Midoriya had been the one to instantly come up with a plan and direct them. His calmness had soothed everyone’s panic. His quick thinking had assured everyone’s doubts. His strength against the villain had given everyone hope. He had saved everyone here.

And they couldn’t save him.

“You’ll be too busy with me,” Midoriya had told the warp villain.

“No,” Uraraka had said, both to the villain and Midoriya. *“You’ll be too busy with* ***us****.”*

But in the end, despite all her pretty words, that’s not what happened, is it?

All of them knew from the quirk assessment test and the battle simulation that Midoriya’s quirk has a crippling side effect. All of them saw how taxing it was for him to keep tossing around the warp

villain to disorient him. And yet none of them could do anything to help him.

She couldn't do anything to help him.

Uraraka's teeth sink deeper into her lip.

"I found him!" Shoji bursts out, and everyone instantly stills and turns to him. Uraraka can see the desperate hope and fear she herself feels reflected on everyone else's face.

Shoji's tentacle-like arms are spread wide like a radio dish, ears and eyes on the ends, tense with concentration.

"Midoriya is down in the central plaza with the warp villain and someone else. I... I think it's their leader. It's the guy that was talking about... about killing us."

They all exchange a fearful look.

No. Not Midoriya. Please not Midoriya. He's— they *need* him, he can't — they can't—

But then, something *explodes.*

Uraraka whips around to turn to the plaza. A column of fire is blazing in the centre, so bright and intense that she can't make out what's going on or who's making the fire. It roars like a fiery dragon clawing its way up to the sky, furious and awe striking in its ethereal rage.

A tremble goes down Uraraka's spine as the pillar of flames blaze away where she knows her friend is.

"Deku."

*

Shigaraki and Kurogiri jump back as they shield their eyes against the blazing light and whipping wind. The pair watch in almost awestruck silence for a moment as the intensity of the flames completely obscures the kid from sight.

The sight is terrible in its brilliance.

“Is that how he got under your skin?” Shigaraki asks Kurogiri.

“No,” the warp villain answers, his misty form flickering in unease and surprise. “I didn’t even know that fire is part of his quirk.”

“This is a cheat,” Shigaraki hisses, narrowing his eyes against the glare. “What is this, phase two? This kid isn’t even a boss!”

His gaming jargon seems to be lost on the older villain, but the sentiment is shared.

Just then, the fire dies down. The flames recede back into the kid, only little flickers running up and down his skin. The light throws his previously soft features into sharp relief and gives his green eyes a strange glint.

The white mask that had been over the kid’s lower face is charred and smoking. He raises one hand to lift it off his face and lower the mangled mess to his collarbone. His eyes seem to be fixated on Nomu and Eraserhead before they slowly shift to Shigaraki.

“Step away from him,” he says softly, and somehow his voice carries with uncanny clarity. His words are pointed to Nomu but they’re addressing Shigaraki, those fiery green eyes boring into the villain. It’s as if he’s already figured out that Nomu only takes orders from Shigaraki in the short time he’s been here.

“If you want to play a game, then fine. Let’s play. But *leave him out of it.”*

Shigaraki pauses, then smiles eerily. So the kid cares about Eraserhead, huh?

“I don’t think I will. It’s more exciting when the stakes are higher, no?”

He points a finger at Eraserhead.

“Nomu—” but before he can give the order, the kid reaches out a hand towards him and makes a sharp pulling gesture. Shigaraki is yanked forward, stumbling and choking on his words. The force itself isn’t very strong but it’s just enough to unbalance him and cut him off. Shigaraki raises his head and looks at the kid with a murderous glare. He kinda sees why even Kurogiri got pissed at this kid.

The kid bares his teeth in a grin.

“Just you and me, Shigaraki. Let’s play.” He cocks his head. "Or are you not game?"

And oh, if you put it *that* way.

He’s not sure how the kid did it, but he’s pushed all the right buttons to make Shigaraki laugh in malicious excitement.

“Fine. Kurogiri, Nomu, back off.”

“Shigaraki Tomura—,” Kurogiri tries, but Shigaraki doesn’t even spare him a glance.

“I said, *back off.”*

Kurogiri wordlessly steps back after his attempt and the Nomu raises its giant body off Eraserhead to meander off.

Shigaraki turns with a grin of his own to face the kid who somehow manages to look almost serene for all that his smile is more or less a snarl.

“Say. What’s your name, mini-boss?”

The kid blinks. Then his lips stretch wider.

“Midoriya Izuku.”

And then a burst of flames comes flying into his face.

*

Izuku grins. He bares his teeth and *grins,* and uses it in the stead of the mouthguard that’s now broken and dangling at his collarbone. He hides behind it like a mask, uses it to bury all his fear and doubts and insecurity of the fire pushing out of him, puts it up as a front to shield himself, and brandishes it like a weapon.

He’s sure he’ll have an appropriate breakdown and freak out about, well, *everything* once he makes out of this. If he makes out of this. For now, though, all he can focus on is the fact that Aizawa has been left alone, he’s facing off the leader of the villains, and he needs to buy as much time as possible.

He can’t afford to break down now.

The fire had burst out of him like his emotions had physically manifested, but now it's smouldered down back inside him. Izuku can't afford an outburst like that again, not with Aizawa so close, but he can't just rely on his pull and open himself up to attack while he rides out the consequences anymore either.

Instead of pulling, Izuku consciously *pushes* a blast of fire out of one hand. Shigaraki dodges out of the way with surprising agility and comes for Izuku with a hand outstretched. But this time Izuku *pulls,* and Shigaraki stumbles as the momentum forces him faster than he’d expected.

Izuku thinks he hears the villain hiss *“Cheat”* but ignores it in favour of bringing around his fist to connect with Shigaraki’s stomach.

The villain coughs, but instead of pulling away he takes advantage of their closeness to grab at Izuku’s face. He pulls himself back, just barely dodging the grasping fingers, and Shigaraki’s hand brushes the mouthguard on his collarbone instead.

It disintegrates in a matter of seconds.

Izuku scrambles back frantically. The broken remnants of the mask fall to the ground with a pitiful clatter. A chill goes through him at the thought that that could have been his face. A burning rage passes through him at the realization that that’s what happened to Aizawa’s raw and exposed elbow.

Shigaraki is flexing his fingers, grinning through the severed hand on his face.

“Ahh. So close.”

He jumps out of the way as another jet of flames come at him.

They continue on like this for a few more tense moments. Izuku is at his limit, not used to using this side of his quirk. Quirks are like muscles, after all, and his are comparable to that of a newborn babe. Finding the balance between push and pull is *not* easy, especially doing it for the first time in the heat of battle. Not to mention that some part of his mind is still freaking out about the fire blazing at his command. He’s both mentally and physically straining himself. It’s the first time he’s actually pushed out the fire instead of having *it* push out of *him,* not since that very first time when he was four and his

mother screamed—

And perhaps that thought causes him to slip. Shigaraki closes in again, one finger just barely grazing Izuku's skin. Izuku flings out his left arm in panic and *pushes,* but instead of the villain dodging the stream of fire like every other time, he recoils with a *scream.*

Izuku freezes. He'd consciously—or perhaps *un*consciously—been avoiding aiming the fire directly at the villain, only using it to intimidate and change his course. Because no matter if this is a villain, no matter if he wants to kill All Might, no matter if he broke Aizawa, Izuku would still never wish this fire on anyone.

(But somewhere in the back of his mind, Hisashi *laughs.*)

The familiar smell of burnt flesh hits Izuku's nose.

The hand on Shigaraki's face has been knocked off by the blast, and he holds one hand near his burned face while the other wildly groups around for it.

"Father," he says.

And suddenly, Izuku is *burning.*

He chokes on a gasp as the fire in his left hand abruptly scorches his palm. He flings his hand away from himself as if trying to shake it off. But in his moment of inattention, Shigaraki has already put the severed hand back on his face and is coming back at Izuku with his hand outstretched.

Izuku *pulls* himself out of the way, but this time doesn't dare follow up with a jet of fire.

Shigaraki grins madly through the hand on his face, his eyes glinting and his left cheek red with a burn.

"Ohh, what's this? Are you burned by your own fire? In that case... Change of tactics. Nomu!"

Shigaraki pivots violently. Izuku is confused for a moment before he realizes that he's headed straight for Aizawa. At the same time, the Nomu awakens from its docile state and springs to action, also headed for the hero from the other side.

Izuku's heart stops for a moment.

He can only pull one thing at a time.

Which means he can only stop one of them if he only pulls.

And, just, no. Whatever fear Izuku has about burning anyone on principle, Shigaraki can't have him. Not Aizawa. Not Eraserhead. Not him, not him, not him not him *not him*—

One hand grasps out and *pulls* Shigaraki back, while the other flings forward and *pushes* a blast of flames at the Nomu. The Nomu shrieks an inhuman sound. Izuku bites his lip as he does his best to ignore it and is already running to put himself between Aizawa and the villains when he hears Shigaraki's delighted laugh.

A warp gate opens in front of Izuku.

His own flames come rushing out of it.

Oh. Oh *shit.*

So this was his plan.

"Checkmate," comes Shigaraki's gleeful voice.

Izuku turns his back to the flames, trying to shield Aizawa as much as possible with his own small body. He grits his teeth and waits for the familiar white-hot pain and scorching agony and the burn, burn, burn —

But it never comes.

A silent beat passes.

"...That was cool, Eraserhead," comes Shigaraki's grudging acknowledgement.

Izuku opens his eyes to find Aizawa still on the floor with his head barely raised, his eyes red and looking straight at him.

He erased Izuku's quirk. He *saved* Izuku, *again,* even while he himself is on the brink of death.

A shaky breath escapes Izuku as Aizawa slumps back down, unconscious, his face planting on the floor again. Izuku is trembling from emotions he can't even name, mouthing words he doesn't even recognize, a sob and a gasp choked in his throat.

He pushes it all down and turns to face the villains again, firmly putting himself between them and Aizawa.

Shigaraki is still on the floor where Izuku had deposited him with his pull and Kurogiri is hanging to the back, but the Nomu is rearing up and screeching. There are still licks of flame charing its skin, yet it still comes dashing towards them.

The momentum is so strong that Izuku isn't sure that even the push of fire will stop it.

But...

"A hero always has more than one trick up their sleeve," Aizawa had said.

In Izuku's case, he has three.

"Sorry, sensei," he whispers as he picks up Aizawa as gently as he can. He's wildly glad for all the weight training All Might made him go through in the junk heap as he bears the hero's full weight in his arms.

Izuku flicks a One For All charged finger in the direction of Shigaraki and Kurogiri, sending a blast of air so that they can't do anything to interfere like last time. He waits for the last moment before the Nomu is upon them, then jumps up, and jumps *off* the Nomu with a One For All powered kick.

SMASH!!

Gusts of wind billow out and Izuku lands clumsily, far from the Nomu, doing his best not to jostle Aizawa. He'd been willing to sacrifice his leg to save Aizawa, even though it would make the fight later on harder, but to his shock his leg isn't shattered. It feels like it's only fractured, maybe. Not that he's complaining.

"What? Telekinesis, fire, and now super strength too? You're a *cheat,"* Shigaraki complains.

"I'm the cheat? You're the one who broke the rule of playing one on one," Izuku shoots back, not daring to set Aizawa down least they come after the hero again.

"But I'm a villain," Shigaraki points out.

Well. Fair point.

The villain scratches his neck.

“Man... I mean this is fun and all, but you keep getting distracted because of Eraserhead. What are you trying to be, a hero?”

Izuku barks out a laugh. He knows he *can't* be one, not with Hisashi's tainted fire burning at his back.

“No. I’m holding on to one, and holding out for another.”

A boom sounds near the entrance of the USJ, and Izuku’s grin widens.

"And it looks like I bought just enough time."

All Might emerges from the smoke, ripping off his tie with a thunderous scowl.

“Have no fear. For I am here.”

*

With the Nomu’s movements hampered by the numerous burns riddling its body, All Might makes quick work of the artificial human. And with Iida bringing the reinforcements, Shigaraki and Kurogiri have no choice but to retreat by themselves.

Shigaraki’s eyes glare at All Might as he sinks into the warp gate.

“We’ve failed this time... but we’ll get you next time, All Might, symbol of peace. And you,” he suddenly turns to Izuku.

Shigaraki *smiles.*

“Let’s play again.”

A shiver goes through Izuku. He clutches Aizawa’s bloody body to his chest as he stands there, almost numb in the aftershock. The adrenaline comes crashing down but his senses are still in frantic overdrive, messing up his cognition and dulling his mind. His ears are ringing with Inko's screams and Hisashi's laugh but his arms are holding one of his heroes. As exhaustion washes over him, he can't—he can't *think.*

“Oh my god— Aizawa!” someone calls as they approach quickly with outstretched arms.

Somewhere in the back of Izuku's foggy mind he recognizes him as Present Mic, but the majority of his mind is still running high on survival and protective instincts. What he sees is a threat that's trying to take Aizawa away, and no, not him, not him not him not him—

Izuku bares his teeth and steps back, tightening his arms carefully around Aizawa.

Something in his leg makes a resounding *snap.*

He doesn't even flinch.

The threat—Present Mic—stops still where he is, evidently noticing that something is wrong. He looks around, then frantically calls to some people and waves them over. Izuku stays where he is, trembling slightly, clutching his broken hero protectively.

A wall of cement swells in front of Izuku, cutting off everyone else (all other threats). Izuku still doesn't let himself relax, though.

But then All Might is there. Not buffed up and towering, but skeletal and bloody and crouching to meet Izuku's eyes without looming over him. In this small secluded sanctuary of cement where only he and his heroes are, Izuku finally feels a little less on edge.

"Midoriya," All Might calls, and it's hard to tell on that gaunt face but Izuku thinks he looks almost as emotionally broken as Aizawa's body is. "Midoriya, my boy, it's alright now. You're safe."

But Izuku just stares at the hero. It's not that he doubts All Might. Even muddled and swaying on his feet as he is, Izuku still implicitly trusts his hero. But with the broken body of his *other* hero in his arms, dizzy from coming down from his high, and instincts in overdrive, he just can't understand what All Might is saying.

All Might blinks as if he's just realized something, and then looks like he's on the verge of crying.

"My boy," he calls again, voice rough and ragged. *"He's* safe. *He's* alright. Aizawa... *Eraserhead is safe."*

And oh. Izuku understands *that.*

He smiles.

It's the last thing he remembers.

*

Toshinori is lying quietly on the hospital bed next to young Midoriya's. Aizawa and No. Thirteen have been carted away to the hospital, none of the other students have been harmed much, and he and Midoriya have been entrusted to Recovery Girl's care.

The nurse tuts from her chair.

"You pushed yourself too far. I won't be surprised if your time went down again. Though, considering the circumstances, I won't say more about that right now. What I *will* say, though, is that you need to start setting a better example for your successor."

Toshinori glances over at young Midoriya. He's still unconscious after having passed out in the USJ. According to Recovery Girl, it has less to do with his physical injuries and more to do with the mental and emotional strain he's gone through.

The boy's hair is out of its usual tuft of a half bun, spilling in dark green curls over the pillow. The dark hair contrasts with the pallor of his face, making him look smaller and paler.

Something in Toshinori *aches.*

When it looks like Toshinori isn't going to answer, Recovery Girl continues.

"He's being smart with One For All and not throwing it around willy-nilly, but I have a feeling that it has less to do with self-preservation and more to do with the fact that it makes him useless after. He already has another self-destructive quirk, and he's been throwing it around without a care for himself. And after what happened today, I'm worried."

Recovery Girl sighs as Toshinori keeps gazing at Midoriya, following his gaze.

"I see why you chose him. I really do. He's selfless, brave, and caring. But Toshinori, before he's a hero in training, before he's your successor, he's also just a *child."*

The elderly nurse gives Toshinori a look.

"He's just like you, in some ways. And Toshinori, while that might be a good thing for a hero... It's *not* for a person. Especially a person you care about."

And Toshinori *understands.*

He props himself up on the bed, turning so he can properly face Midoriya. He hears Recovery Girl sighing again in sympathy and compassion, but he doesn't have the presence of mind to properly talk to her right now.

Just yesterday, she had told him about Midoriya's scars. She had told him what she had seen, what she *hadn't* seen, what she suspected, what it implied. And she had also cautioned him not to approach this subject with Midoriya rashly.

Just yesterday, he had been told that his bright, kind, caring heir with a heart of gold has scars that dig deep, deeper than any child should have.

Just yesterday, he'd had his heart ache for his protegee.

And today, his heart feels like it's being slowly and methodically dismantled.

He remembers how he found young Midoriya facing off the three main villains with an injured Aizawa in his arms, eyes wild and teeth bared in a desperate grin. He remembers all the blood, smoke, and burns that covered his body. He remembers how protective he was of his teacher even while half unconscious and delirious. He remembers how the boy had only looked relieved at the words that Aizawa, not himself, was safe.

All Might understands more than anyone that a hero, and that especially the beacon of hope and the symbol of peace, must push aside their own wellbeing for the sake of others. As the former wielder, he couldn't have made a better choice for the next successor of One For All.

But as a *mentor...*

The weight of passing on his duty finally crashes into Toshinori as he realizes that seeing Midoriya as his successor is not the same thing as seeing the boy as *his.*

Just then, Midoriya stirs. His lashes flutter a few times before blinking blearily up at Toshinori.

“All Might...?”

Toshinori swallows around the lump in his throat. “Yes, my boy.”

Midoriya stares up at him tiredly as if confused for a moment. But then he *beams.*

“I’m glad you’re alright.”

And at that— Toshinori just, he *can’t.*

He should probably say something. He should applaud Midoriya’s courage, or thank him for weakening the Nomu, and tell the boy that he’s *so proud* of him.

But in the end, all he can do is climb over to the boy's bed and envelop the child in his arms. Midoriya stiffens as if not used to being hugged, and that just *breaks* Toshinori all the more as he cards one hand through the boy's curly hair falling freely to his chin.

It takes a moment, but Midoriya finally wraps his arms around Toshinori as well. He's hesitant, as if unused to physical contact and also unsure why Toshinori is acting like this all of the sudden.

He doesn't care. Toshinori hugs his boy tightly to his chest.

*

They have the next day off from school.

Aizawa is let out from the hospital, albeit with bandages covering his entire body, turning him into a mummy. Yamada is here to help him out, cheerily ignoring Aizawa’s longsuffering protests that he’s just fine.

“Go on, go on, I’ll get your stuff,” he grins. “You don’t want to keep your kid waiting for you, do you?”

Aizawa blinks.

And when he gets down to the hospital lobby, he finds none other than Midoriya Izuku sitting with his head bowed on one of the waiting chairs.

He sighs. Then he slowly makes his way over and plops down next to the kid.

Midoriya absentmindedly raises his head, then does a double take.

“Erase— Aizawa sensei?!” he gapes. (Aizawa notes that the kid’s almost called him by his hero name again.) “Shouldn’t you be in bed?!”

“And shouldn’t you be at home?” he returns, slouching and leaning back in the plastic chair. He shuffles his casts so they lie more comfortably on the stomach of his black t-shirt, then peers at Midoriya out of the side of his gaze.

They sit in silence for a while. Midoriya doesn’t look like he’s about to breach a topic soon so Aizawa ponders how to go about handling his problem child. He could mention how reckless it was for the kid to try to face three of the main villains on his own. He could reprimand him for not leaving Aizawa and getting wounded. Or he could try to get him to talk about that blazing fire he saw when he briefly woke up.

“So,” he begins. “You never told me you can use fire.”

The kid *winces.*

“Ah. Um. No. I mean, no I didn’t tell you, not that I can’t use it. I’m— I’m sorry.”

Aizawa blinks. “For what?”

Midoriya looks up at him with something akin to bewilderment.

“The— the *fire.* I know that it only causes destruction. It's not a quirk that can save anyone. I kept it down for so long, and I never should have used it, but I couldn’t think of anything else at that moment. I... I’m *so sorry.”*

And well, that doesn't explain much. Aizawa doesn’t understand fully what’s going on, but he hasn’t been teaching teenagers for years with nothing to show for it. He pieces together what he remembers and what he’s heard since waking up with what the kid is saying now.

It looks like part of Midoriya's quirk is fire.

And he's absolutely traumatized by it.

Aizawa was going to scold Midoriya for being so reckless, for having no self-preservation, for valuing a pro's life over his own. But at this moment, he looks at this kid who's hunched over with despair draped over him like a physical weight, who's crushed by insecurity and shame even after having almost single-handedly dealt with the situation after himself and Thirteen were out of commission, who's just so broken— and realizes that's not what the kid needs right now.

He gives a mental *screw the plan.*

"If anyone should be apologizing, it should be me. I failed to protect you. But from what I remember, and especially from what I've been hearing, you *saved* me. *And* All Might. The fire weakened the Nomu enough for All Might to pull through, and there wasn't a single burn on me. So Midoriya," Aizawa waits until the kid hesitantly raises his head to meet his eyes.

"Thank you."

He gasps.

"But... but *you* had to save *me* again," he says disbelievingly. (Aizawa files away that "again" for later pursuit.) Outwardly, he shrugs.

"It's called teamwork, brat. And I did tell you to find a way around that puking. That was your fire, I presume?" He still remembers the burns on the kid's palm, after all. He can make an educated guess. Midoriya nods numbly, and Aizawa gently plops his cast on top of his head.

"Good to see you take advice to heart."

Midoriya slowly raises his hands to the top of his head, all the while staring up at Aizawa like he can't believe he's being praised and thanked. The lost look in his big green eyes makes Aizawa want to do something ridiculous, but thankfully both his arms are in a cast so he physically can't do anything too touchy-feely.

Instead, he lightly rubs the end of his cast on the top of Midoriya's head in an awkward pat.

"I don't know what you think about it, but you saved me and All

Might with your fire, Midoriya. You did good. Don't forget that."

And for the look that Midoriya gives him, he might as well have told him he'd hung the moon.

*

Yamada comes back (suspiciously late) with Aizawa's hero costume and other belongings. He grins at Midoriya and the kid smiles tentatively back.

"I'm sorry I didn't recognize you yesterday, Present Mic," he says while stooping into a low bow.

Yamada waves it off. "Don't worry about it; I understand that emotions and instincts can get high in stressful situations."

But then his smile takes on a devilish turn.

"Though I *do* wish I took pictures when you were holding Aizawa bridal style," Yamada says with a wink.

Midoriya sputters. Aizawa blinks. Then he slowly turns to stare at his student as if to say *you did what.* Midoriya's face is turning into an impressive shade of red, and he knows the truth without having to hear a word.

He can almost picture it. Himself, slack and unconscious, with Midoriya holding his almost too long form in an awkward bridal style.

The mental image is... something else.

"My hero," Aizawa deadpans, and the kid looks like he wants to sink right into the earth.

Aizawa lowers his head to hide his grin in the folds of his bandages.

Chapter End Notes

I can just imagine a Behind the Scenes where DadMight and Dadzawa are all like

Aizawa: Okay. I'm the bad cop, and you're the good cop. You go in and tell the kid he did good, and I'll scold him and tell him to stop being so self-destructive. Got it?
All Might: Got it!
a few moments later
DadMight: (ends up just hugging his bunny boy)
Dadzawa: (ends up just comforting his problem child)

SPORTS FESTIVAL NEXT
IZUKU HEADBANG

"We're Next"

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As soon as Izuku arrives at school, he's swarmed by a horde of his classmates.

"Deku!"

"Midoriya!"

"Oh man, hey guys! It's Midoriya!"

Izuku blinks in bewilderment.

"Did... did something happen?"

Uraraka looks at him like she can't even believe him. "Did something *happen?* Are you *kidding* me? You got kidnapped by the warp villain right in front of our eyes! And the next time we saw you was when you were being carried out of the USJ on a stretcher! And you're asking me if something *happened?!"*

"What Ochako is saying," Asui supplements Uraraka's almost tearful exclamation, "is that we were worried about you, ribbit."

Oh. Of course they were, Izuku realizes with a start. The students clustered around him with the most worried and relieved expressions are the ones who had been with him at the entrance of the USJ. And the last time they saw him... yeah, he wasn't in that good shape.

Izuku can't help it. He smiles.

"Sorry for worrying you. But... thank you, too. I'm alright."

Sero and Sato make a show of patting him down as if to check, and Izuku laughs out loud.

God, it feels *good* having friends.

"We saw a huge fire down in the plaza. You didn't get caught in that, did you?"

And just like that, Izuku's emotions come plummeting back down

from it's high. Because life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't *kind.*

He should tell them. Tell them that it was his quirk. They deserve to know.

He opens his mouth.

"...Aizawa Sensei erased it before it burned me," is what he ends up saying.

Which is *true,* but it isn't the *truth.*

His classmates' sigh of relief makes Izuku *hate* himself, but the fact is that even with All Might hugging him and whispering that he's *so proud* in his ear, even with Aizawa patting his head and *thanking* him, it's still not quite enough to overwrite more than a decade of negative reinforcement.

The others are oblivious to Izuku's inner turmoil and continue chattering.

"You know, I was really worried yesterday since I couldn't even contact you and check if you were alright. And that got me thinking—why don't we exchange numbers?"

"Hey, great idea! We can make it a whole class thing, like for emergencies and stuff!"

Things take off from there. It takes a few crazed moments of everyone passing their phone to the next person before Yaoyorozu suggests everyone just give their number to Iida, and he can send a group text of the entire list to everyone else.

"Yo, Bakugo! Hurry up and give the class pres your number, man!" Kirishima calls.

"Ha? As if I'd let extras like you have my number!"

Their classmates grumble, almost used to Bakugo's crassness by now. Izuku just hums and scrolls through his own phone.

"Here, I have his number. You can add this under his name, Iida."

"Deku?!" Bakugo gives him a look that's positively *betrayed* and Ashido openly laughs at his face.

Izuku smiles to his friends' laughter. He feels so blessed to be among

them.

He told All Might and Aizawa that half his quirk is fire. Maybe someday... someday, he'll work up the courage to tell them too.

*

A mummified Aizawa informs them of the Sports Festival, and excitement is at an all-time high. Even Uraraka, who's usually an amiable ball of sunshine, is smouldering with competitive zeal. Midoriya and Iida hear her reason for becoming a hero while on the way to lunch, and she seems embarrassed at first but beams with gratitude when both boys assure her.

"Say, Deku, I just told you my reason for wanting to become a hero, and we know Iida's from a hero family, but what about you?"

"Good question, Uraraka! If you don't mind us asking, of course, Midoriya?"

Midoriya hesitates for a moment. But before the silence can stretch on too long, All Might appears around the corner.

"Midoriya, my boy!" And after that buoyant call, the hero almost shyly holds up a bento wrapped in a bunny-printed handkerchief that looks far too cute and small for his hulking form. "Would you care to have lunch with me?"

Uraraka does a spit take as she laughs. "Are you a school girl?!"

Even after Midoriya has left with All Might, Uraraka can't keep in her chuckling.

"I never thought I'd see the symbol of peace act like a scene from a shoujo manga. Though I do wonder why he called Deku."

Iida hums and adjusts his glasses as they get in line at the cafeteria. "Perhaps... it has to do with what happened at the USJ?"

Uraraka instantly sobers at that.

"Midoriya is the one who made the plan and bought me enough time to get the other teachers, after all. And I hear that he held off the

leader of the villains until All Might got there. It would be no surprise if All Might took an interest in Midoriya," Iida muses as he picks up his lunch.

But he belatedly notices that Uraraka is uncharacteristically quiet.

"Uraraka?"

"It's just," Uraraka begins with her head down. "He shouldn't have *had* to. He shouldn't have had to fight the warp villain or the creepy leader on his own. We... *I* should have helped. I was right there. He saved me, and I couldn't save him. And I feel so... *useless."*

She angrily brushes a fist over her eyes.

Iida is at a loss. He's never been good at social interactions, too honest and eccentric to fit in. Midoriya and Uraraka have been infinitely understanding and kind, but he's still completely at lost on how to comfort a crying girl.

He finds himself wishing for Midoriya.

But thankfully, Uraraka is a strong-willed hero-in-training and soon lifts her head on her own without Iida having to embarrass both of them with his awkward attempts at comfort.

"But from now on, I'm going to do better. *Be* better," she says determinedly.

And at those words, Iida is instantly ashamed. He thinks of how utterly lost he was without Midoriya, how he'd had to have the other boy instruct him even though he's the class president, how even just now he'd instinctively looked for Midoriya's help.

He sets his jaw.

"As will I, Uraraka."

They will do better, be better.

Iida glances down at Uraraka. She has a determined expression on her face, but her eyes are still tearily bright and she's sniffling.

"Would you like another mochi?" Iida tries, offering his desert.

Uraraka *beams* at him.

They're too engrossed in their conversation to notice that one Todoroki Shouto has heard every single word.

*

Toshinori guides young Midoriya to a private room, then locks it before reverting back into his true form. He takes a seat across from the boy, pouring them each a cup of tea.

He's stalling. He knows this. And yet...

Toshinori had originally called the boy in order to tell him that the Sports Festival is the best chance to spread his name to the world, to take the first step in becoming the number one hero and symbol of peace.

But he remembers what Recovery Girl said. He remembers how utterly terrified he had been at the sight of his protegee facing off villains on his own.

It's one thing to see Midoriya as his successor.

It's another to see the boy as *his*.

As the previous wielder of One For All, Toshinori knows what he needs to do, what *Midoriya* needs to do. But as someone who's come to care for the boy, he doesn't *want* to. He doesn't want to put more pressure on this child who's already burdened by so much, he doesn't want to expose him more when already Shigaraki has his eyes on him, he doesn't want to put him in danger when he's already ridden with who knows how many scars.

Toshinori is conflicted between his duty and his emotions.

And the worst part is that he already knows what Midoriya will choose in a heartbeat.

Too much like Toshinori himself, the boy will choose to do the right thing without a second thought to his own wellbeing.

"All Might? Is something wrong?" Midoriya asks quizzically once the silence stretches on too long.

Toshinori looks at how the boy is holding the cup of tea between his hands like a bunny holding a carrot between its paws, at the greenish dark hair pulled back into a half-bun like a rabbit's tail, and at those big green eyes.

...Well. It's just a Sports Festival. It's not like he can be hurt too severely in a school event.

Right?

He clears his throat. "Ah, no. I just wanted to talk to you about the Sports Festival. Considering what happened at the USJ, do you have a better hold on your quirks than before?"

Midoriya frowns slightly, looking down at his hands.

"I... I've been thinking about it too, and... I think so. When I used One For All to kick the Nomu, I didn't get much of a backlash."

Toshinori spits out his tea.

"Your leg was cracked in three different places!" he protests.

Midoriya just blinks.

"Oh."

Then he shrugs. "That's probably because I kicked off the ground first before kicking the Nomu... Well, at least it wasn't shattered and flopping around like a rubber chicken."

And Toshinori can't even— he gave the power to Midoriya knowing that the boy probably wouldn't be able to use One For All as naturally as he himself did, but he'd never known just how casual and dismissive he'd be about his own wellbeing.

Midoriya continues as if he's said nothing wrong.

"It's the first time I tried to use it on a person, even if it was an artificial human, so maybe that put a break on my subconscious. It feels like trying to cook an egg in a microwave. Too hot, and it... or rather, *I'll* burst. And as for my original quirk..."

He hums, a crease forming between his brows.

"...I've only ever tried to use my *pull,* and never tried to *push* out fire consciously. Even when I had to let it out because of the backlash, I've

always tried to make the fire as small as possible. But when I freely used fire and my pull at the same time without restraint against Shigaraki, I didn't feel any backlash at all. I think... it's like a water hose. Whenever the fire tried to come out, I've tried to stop it at the nozzle. And that made the pressure build up and swell the pipe, eventually making the hose burst. Or in my case, violently throw up flames."

Toshinori stares at the boy that's full-on muttering away now.

He has two powerful quirks like super strength and fire, and he compares it to mundane objects like a *microwave* and a *water hose.* This boy. Is unbelievable.

The man snorts, then shakes his head.

"Well, it's good that you figured out a way around. Especially because..." And now he's going to have to do it. "As the next symbol of peace, the Sports Festival is the best opportunity for you to announce that 'I am here' to the world!"

Midoriya looks at him for a long moment. And then, just as Toshinori had predicted, he nods.

"I understand."

(Of course he does. This is the boy who tried to give up his dream and keep Toshinori from passing on One For All to him on the basis that people need the symbol of peace, after all.)

Toshinori swallows down the bitter taste in his throat and tries to smile.

"Good. I hope you have your representative speech ready."

The boy looks like someone pushed the pause button.

"My *what?"*

An absolutely *horrified* expression crawls on young Midoriya's face. This time, Toshinori doesn't have to fake the mirth and throws his head back to laugh out loud.

*

During the weeks following up to the Sports Festival, Izuku divides his time between doing school work, training, trying to figure out his quirk, and freaking out about the speech.

The student who placed first in the entrance exams annually makes the opening speech as the student representative. Izuku knew this, of course, but he's just never thought of it in context with *himself*.

At one point Iida suggests asking Aizawa for advice.

Izuku looks at him like he's just told him to go tickle a sleeping dragon.

"Why not?" Iida asks, perplexed. "He's our homeroom teacher, after all. Aren't teachers here to guide us?"

And, well, if you put it that way.

But the thing is, Aizawa is still Izuku's hero before he is his teacher. The thought of just casually walking up to the man is still foreign. And besides, Izuku has never had the concept of looking to adults for help.

Eventually, though, it's Uraraka who takes initiative. One morning after homeroom, Uraraka grabs Izuku's shoulders and shoves him towards Aizawa.

"Deku has something to tell you, Sensei!" she says with a cheery grin before bolting out the door. Since their next class is P.E. all the other students file out to go change until the only people left are Aizawa and Izuku, who's frozen in place.

The hero turns and raises an eyebrow. Izuku gulps.

"I, um." Well, now that it's upon him, might as well, right? And if his fanboy heart is a little excited about talking to Aizawa privately again, well, sue him.

"It's just, I have to make the speech at the Sports Festival. And... I have no idea what to say," he admits.

Aizawa looks like he's relaxing minutely, as if he'd been expecting something of a far more serious nature.

"You know you don't have to give a tear-jerker or anything, right? Most people aren't even going to remember the speech."

It sounds almost crass, but somehow that eases Izuku's nerves.

Aizawa hesitates, then gently bumps Izuku's head with the end of his cast.

"Keep it simple. Don't worry about it too much."

Izuku unconsciously raises his hands to rub the spot Aizawa bumped him as if committing the feeling to memory. He still has no idea what to say, but even so he's already feeling much better. Maybe Iida was on to something.

"Thank you, Sensei!" he beams.

Aizawa avoids his eyes. Izuku thinks he hears "too bright" mumbled into the folds of Aizawa's bandages, but he's not sure.

With his nerves at least slightly calmed down, Izuku feels a little better.

But there's another thing that bothers him, though. Thanks to spending his early childhood being hyper-aware of Hisashi's every breath, glance, and footstep, Izuku has pretty good situational awareness, if he says so himself. And lately, his instincts have picked up on the feeling of being constantly watched.

And the culprit is none other than Todoroki Shouto.

It's confusing, to say the least. He and Todoroki don't really have any point of contact. Forget him, Izuku doesn't think Todoroki has *anything* with *anyone*. And Izuku doesn't remember doing anything particular to garner his attention between the time Todoroki started watching him and before, yet here they are.

One day he turns at the sensation of being watched yet again to catch Todoroki staring at him.

"Do you have something to say, Todoroki?" he asks.

The other boy blinks slowly.

"No. At least, not yet."

Well, isn't *that* enlightening.

Izuku doesn't get a proper explanation until the day of the Sports Festival. And when he does, what an explanation it is.

“Midoriya,” Todoroki calls in the waiting room. A few people turn curiously since it’s rare for him to speak up, but he doesn’t even give them any notice. His eyes are focused solely on Izuku.

“Objectively speaking, I think I’m above you in terms of practical strength by a margin if only because my quirk doesn’t rebound as much as yours. But even so, you’ve not only placed first in the entrance exam and faced off the leader of the villains at the USJ, but you’ve also got All Might’s attention.”

At his last words, Izuku *freezes*. But before he can deny or deflect that (all too true) accusation, Todoroki is already moving on.

“I won’t pry into that, but know this. I’m going to beat you.”

Todoroki’s mismatched eyes bore into Izuku.

Izuku can only blink back blankly.

Where on earth did *that* come from.

“Where the hell did *that* come from?!”

Izuku starts, but then confirms that no, it *wasn’t* his own mouth that said that. Bakugo has stood up from his chair and is seething as he stalks towards Todoroki.

“This bastard,” he jerks his thumb at Izuku while not taking his eyes off Todoroki for a second, “is *mine*. You don’t get to jump in out of nowhere and just declare him your rival. He’s mine, and I’m going to beat you *and* him, got that?!”

Todoroki narrows his eyes and opens his mouth as if to say something back, but Izuku decides to interject before things can get too heated between the two.

“I feel so loved,” Izuku deadpans dryly, doing his best impersonation of Aizawa.

The look Bakugo and Todoroki give him is *priceless*.

Man, if he'd known it would be this fun, Izuku should have started talking back to Bakugo years ago.

Some of their classmates are snickering behind their hands or just outright guffawing without restraint. It seems like the nervous air that has been curling around their ankles has been dispelled, including

Izuku's jittery nerves.

"While it's an honour that you think highly of me, I'm not the only competition, Todoroki, Kacchan. Everyone will be doing their best."

"You bet we will!" Kirishima agrees with a toothy grin and a fist pump while Ashido, Kaminari, and a few others cheer along.

"But," Izuku bares his teeth in a grin. *"I won't lose."*

He turns, leaving behind a frozen Todoroki and Bakugo. There's a beat of silence before everyone starts scrambling after him. As Izuku marches with his classmates to the arena, he finally feels ready to face the world.

And it does indeed feel like the world.

As soon as they step inside the stadium, their ears are assaulted by the noise. Izuku almost winces, but does his best to keep his head up as they approach the centre where Midnight is waiting. The hype around class 1-A seems to be driving the crowd mad, and Izuku really does feel sorry for all the other classes.

"Alright, fair play, everyone!" Midnight calls as she cracks her whip. "Now, player representative, Midoriya Izuku of class 1-A!"

The people from other classes grumble around them at yet another call for class 1-A, but Izuku's classmates grin and give him a thumbs up or a pat on the back as they part for him. Their encouragement and the thought that his mother, All Might, and Aizawa are all watching keeps Izuku's feet steady as he walks up to the podium.

"As the next symbol of peace, announce that 'I am here' to the world!" All Might had said.

"Keep it simple," Aizawa had advised.

And at this moment, what Izuku needs to say, what he *wants* to say is...

He looks around the stadium. He looks at the spectators, the students, the teachers, the press, the heroes on patrol duty or even just here for scouting. All of them are part of this society held together by heroes.

And he must be next.

"All Might is the symbol of peace. His very existence suppresses

villainy and saves us." He begins. "But he's not the only hero."

Izuku thinks of Aizawa. Of Thirteen. Of the countless other heroes he's heard of on the news. Of all the other people that help them.

"Even if they are not the number one, even if they are not on the frontlines, all heroes and supporters work tirelessly to protect our lives, our dreams, our loved ones. They *save* us, and that is what makes them heroes. And we—"

He sweeps out an arm over the assembled students, not just class 1-A but all eleven classes from all departments.

Finally, his hand comes to rest upon his own chest.

He bares his teeth in a grin.

"We're next."

The crowd explodes.

(Someday in the near future, All Might will stand on the ruins of Kamino Ward with a defeated All For One at his feet. He will point into the camera, and in a parody of this exact moment, he will say: *"You're next."*)

(The public will explode. Side-by-side comparison videos of All Might's declaration and Izuku's speech will break the internet. Speculations will run wild about the number one hero and the first year representative.)

(But that is not for many weeks yet.)

*

The first stage of the Sports Festival is an obstacle course.

Todoroki makes good on his declaration of war by doing his best to make even more obstacles with his ice, but class 1-A is too used to his tactics by now to fall for it.

Izuku *pulls* himself across the ice and over the frozen zero-point bots, hitting the ground running. He already feels the fire trying to push out

of him and desperately wishes for his mouthguard, but it's been sent to the support department after being mangled from too much heat when Izuku fought against Shigaraki. And besides, support items aren't even allowed for students from the department of heroics that don't expressly *need* them.

Izuku has learned that freely letting out the fire instead of trying to keep it bottled up gets rid of the violent fits.

But he can't just let it blaze away in open sight.

Not now.

Not with his mother watching.

So Izuku brings his left hand in front of his body, curling the fingers as if holding an invisible ball. He carefully pushes out fire through his palm, not trying to stop it but guiding it instead. Now that he isn't trying to suppress it, the fire is pliant, obeying his will without any violent outburst. Izuku pushes out a constant flow of flames out of his palm but makes it curl into itself, forming an orb that's cradled within the cage of his fingers.

This is what Izuku has been working on for the past few weeks between the USJ incident and the Sports Festival. Aizawa was right; he can't afford to waste precious time heaving during a battle, and the fight with Shigaraki got him thinking and experimenting until he found a reasonable substitute for his mouthguard.

The constant and steady flow of pushing keeps the output balanced enough to allow Izuku to keep using his pull, but it's still contained enough that he doesn't have to worry about burning anyone else. And if the fire decides to start burning him again, the only area that will be burned is his left palm and fingers. It does completely occupy his left arm, but he's willing to sacrifice the mobility of one arm for the use of his pull.

Izuku keeps his left hand that's holding the ball of flames close to his chest so that the back of his hand hides most of the light, and reaches out with his right hand to *pull* himself forward.

Once he's negated the backlash, it's almost laughable how easily he clears the obstacle course. Iida may be made for speed, but with all the obstacles his engines don't have the opportunity to shine. Bakugo can blast himself forward, but it's only short bursts of speed. And Todoroki may have had the initial lead, but he can't really do

anything as Izuku practically *flies* past him on the minefield without even touching the ground.

“INNNNNNCREDIBLE! Ladies and gents, we have our winner, and boy did he make it look easy! Give a round of cheers for MIDORIYA IZUKU!!”

Izuku skids through the finish line, still not having a way to counteract the momentum of his pull. Luckily the obstacle course was an open lane, but he’s going to have to figure out a way to do that or else he’ll just smack right into a wall or something in the wrong circumstances.

But for the moment, he pushes aside all thoughts of his quirk and looks around the roaring crowd.

He finds All Might.

He *grins.*

*

Toshinori is so, *so* proud of young Midoriya. His heart swells as he watches his successor... no, he’s lying if he says that now. He watches *his boy,* and he’s never, ever felt so proud in his life. Forget making a statement to the world, he just wants Midoriya to do his best and receive all the praise he deserves.

“What do you think?”

“For starters, Midoriya’s stock is going to rise immensely,” Toshinori hears from somewhere behind him. He turns to find the students from the department of management grouped together and talking amongst themselves.

“We didn’t get to see exactly what his quirk was, though. Some kind of transportation quirk?”

“It could be some kind of telekinesis, too. Though he did keep one hand to his chest, so maybe it has a handicap.”

“Suppose we were to sell his assets, how would we go about it?”

“Well, since we don’t have enough information on his quirk, we can start with his appearance. His looks are actually pretty cute; with those big eyes and freckles, we could sell his image to be kind and friendly.”

“Hm, good point. You know what, he reminds me of a bunny for some reason... Do you think we could convince him to wear a bunny costume? Strictly for promotional value, of course.”

And Toshinori is shaking, shoving a fist into his mouth as he wheezes so hard that he starts coughing up blood, but oh, does he want to butt in their conversation. He wants to tell them *so bad* that Midoriya’s costume *already* looks like a bunny.

And his boy still has *no clue.*

Chapter End Notes

So Izuku is basically holding a rasengan. ¯_(ツ)_/¯

You know what, I’m actually pretty excited for the Izuku vs. Shinso fight. I haven’t written it yet and thus have no idea how it’ll turn out, so don’t get your hopes up, but...
Izuku headbang

And have I ever said all your lovely comments are the lifeblood of this fic? Thank you. So much. For all your comments.

+ Bonus: Personal favorite line(s) of this chapter:
1. We're next / You're next
2. "I feel so loved." *deadpan*

When Like Meets Like

Chapter Notes

> Just to clear some things up: as far as I can tell, in canon, and thus in this fic, Endeavor never actually "beat" Todoroki or his mother on the same level as Hisashi. We see he punched Todoroki in the name of "training" and slapped his mother when she tried to stop him, but it's not exactly the same as Hisashi's violence. Doesn't make Endeavor any less of a piece of flaming trash, but his category of trashiness is a little different from Hisashi's. Endeavor did terrible things to get what he wanted; Hisashi did terrible things because that *was* what he wanted. Their malevolence and intention is the difference between Endeavor and Hisashi, between the hero and the villain.
> I'm not trying to say one is worse than the other. They're both horrible, and pain is relative. But this is kinda an important distinction between Todoroki's and Izuku's situation that will (probably) come in to play later, so I just wanted to clarify.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The second stage of the Sports Festival is a human cavalry battle. And for coming in first place in the previous event, a whopping ten million points are placed on Izuku's head.

Plus Ultra indeed.

With a staggering amount of individual points, the added points his teammates may bring really don't matter. The problem is convincing anyone to team up with him in the first place. Because no matter how you look at it, that ten million is a target more than anything else.

But before Izuku can start to panic, familiar voices call out to him.

"Deku!"

"Midoriya!"

"Hey, Midoriya!"

Izuku turns, surprised, to find a group of his classmates gathered around him. They themselves blink at each other, then break into understanding grins.

Sero sheepishly rubs the back of his neck.

“Guess everyone had the same idea, huh?”

“The same idea?” Izuku repeats, perplexed.

Ashido playfully jostles him. “We want to team up with you, duh!”

Izuku blinks. “What— But— I mean, I’m grateful, but… *why?”*

And maybe he’s looking a gift horse in the mouth, but it just doesn’t make any sense. But his classmates don’t seem to agree with him.

“What do you mean, why? Why not?”

“Yeah! We already know you’re strong and capable.”

“You always have a plan, ribbit.”

“And… we want to make it up to you.”

…Huh?

Uraraka lifts her chin and meets Izuku’s eyes determinedly.

“We… *I* couldn’t help you at the USJ. But this time, I’ll do better. I’ll *be* better. This time, *I won’t let you down.”*

Izuku listens to Uraraka’s vehement promise with wide eyes, then looks around to find her sentiment reflected on all the others' faces.

Oh, he realizes.

Uraraka. Asui. Sero. Sato. Ashido. Shoji.

All of them are from the group that was with Izuku at the entrance of the USJ.

Asui gives him a smile.

“Ochako is right, ribbit. Part of me wants to team up with you because I know that you’re a strategic planner and a great leader. But also, this time, I want to *help* you, like you helped *me.”*

And Izuku can tell that she’s sincere. That *they’re* sincere. And he… he doesn’t know how to respond.

They say that weathering hardship brings people together. It looks like

it's true.

He wants to tell them that they've already more than helped him with their support and friendship. That it's not their fault Kurogiri kidnapped him. That they shouldn't blame themselves.

But he also knows that they won't believe him. Not yet.

So Izuku swallows thickly and puts as much sincerity as he can into his next words.

"Thank you."

*

In the end, Izuku forms a team with Uraraka, Shoji, and Hatsume Mei from the support department.

The others assure Izuku not to feel bad for not choosing them and wander away ("Hey, wonder if Bakugo might— oh dang it, he's already made a team.") before they form a team among themselves.

Thanks to having formed a team pretty quickly, they have plenty of time to discuss strategy.

"All right," Izuku begins as his team gathers around him. "The goal of the human cavalry battle is to get as many points as possible, but *we* will be playing a different game. Even if one team manages to hoard all the other points, it'll still be nothing compared to our ten million. So all we need to do is defend our headband. But the problem is that pretty much everyone will come after us."

"But you have a plan, right?" Uraraka says, and it's less of a question as it is a confirmation.

Izuku nods.

"Shoji will be our radar. With your eyes and ears, you can let us know where people are coming from or if there are any ambushes. With Uraraka making everyone except herself weightless, I can pull us *really fast* in any direction, giving us mobility. But it's only in a straight line and has no brakes. That's where Hatsume's babies come in. Hatsume, you and Uraraka will have a thruster each and use them to dodge

other teams in the way or cushion our momentum before we hit a wall. If we keep this up for long enough, the others teams will eventually get desperate and target each other instead of us to get as many points as they can before the 15 minutes are up. And less attention on us means less danger, so it will be easier to defend ourselves later on."

He pauses his rapid-fire instructions to look up at them.

"Does... does that sound alright to you all?"

Uraraka beams. "Of course it does, Deku!"

"As expected, Midoriya," Shoji nods with a smile.

Their unwavering faith in him is doing things to Izuku's stomach. And his heart. Maybe even his head.

Hatsume is making creepy chuckling noises out of the corner of her mouth, looking absolutely *delighted.*

"Ohh, I *knew* it was a good choice to team up with you! And you're calling my babies 'babies!' We're going to get along *so* well."

Present Mic is starting the countdown, and Uraraka uses her quirk on everyone before they get into position and bolster Izuku up into the rider seat. He ties their headband of 10,000,290 points firmly on his head.

"Uraraka. Shoji. Hatsume."

He bares his teeth, and their answering grins are almost as savage as his.

"Let's do this."

"START!!"

As soon as Present Mic gives the signal a swarm of teams head toward them. But Team Izuku is already on the move.

"Opening at 7 o'clock!" Shoji calls out, his tentacle-like arms swerving around and checking all angles with the eyes and ears on the ends.

"Got it!" Izuku replies and *pulls* them in that direction, far out of the way before the foremost groups can even get within range of them. A few people from another team yelp as Team Izuku comes *flying* in

their direction.

“Uraraka! Hatsume!”

“Roger!” they gleefully shout as they aim their thrusters. A well-timed blast sends them whizzing past the other team instead of crashing into them.

Uraraka laughs delightedly. “This is so much fun!”

Hatsume does her creepy low cackle. “And did you see their *faces?* Everyone's sure to be looking at my babies now! My babies are soooooo cute!”

The tentacle mouth Shoji is keeping near Izuku grins, and Izuku himself laughs out loud.

“Do you think we should grab a few headbands too, just in case?” the other boy asks.

Izuku hums, looking around the arena.

“Not yet. It’s a good backup plan, but let’s wait until the targets are more dispersed and everyone starts paying less attention to us. What we really want is for fewer people to be coming after us, but if we take their headbands now they might just take it personally and hound us till the end.”

“Ah. Understood.”

They continue on like that, evading any team by a large margin. It’s a good few minutes before a roar finally catches up to them.

“DEKU!!”

“Kacchan?!” Izuku sputters as Bakugo comes blasting towards him from the sky. He manages to shake off his shock and *pulls* them out of the way, trusting Uraraka and Hatsume to guide their path.

Bakugo’s horses, consisting of Kirishima, Jiro, and Tokoyami, hurry to catch up with him. Dark Shadow plucks a grumpy Bakugo out of the air and back to his rider seat. Bakugo struggles against its hold, though Izuku notices he isn't blasting at it, and shakes his fist at Izuku.

“You’d better not be thinking about that Half and Half, you bastard! I told you to keep your eyes on me. I was *first,* and you’re *mine!”*

Uraraka makes a small *huh,* and muses with a thoughtful expression.

“You know, that kinda sounds romantic if you take it out of context...”

“Shut the fuck up, Round Face!”

“Round Face?!” she sputters. But Bakugo isn’t even listening to her anymore.

“Hair for Brains! Charge!” he commands, repeatedly bonking Kirishima’s hardened head.

“Man, just have some chill, dude!” the boy complains. Tokoyami and Jiro have a longsuffering look, though judging by the headbands around Bakugo’s neck neither are regretting having teamed up with the explosive blonde.

But Izuku just grins and gives Bakugo a cheeky salute.

“Sorry, Kacchan. But I gotta go.”

“Incoming from 2, 8, and 5 o’clock!” comes Shoji’s warning, and Izuku *pulls* them far away in a heartbeat.

Bakugo’s enraged scream trails after them.

“DEKUUU! Fucking FIGHT ME!!!!”

“Get in line!” he quips back.

“THE FUCK DO YOU MEAN, I’VE *BEEN* IN LINE FOR TEN YEARS, YOU FUCKING ARROGANT BASTA—”

But his rant is cut short when someone from class 1-B... Monoma? Swipes Bakugo’s headband in his moment of distraction. And just like that, all of Bakugo’s rage, frustration, and attention is promptly switched to Monoma’s team.

Poor things. They had *no idea* what they were dealing with.

Uraraka snickers into her hand as Monoma is literally bombarded with Bakugo’s brand of intensity. But their moment of humour is cut short when a new team slides in front of them.

“Now the first half of the 15 minutes are up!” Present Mic gleefully shouts among the chaos.

Todoroki's mismatched eyes bore into Izuku's. "It's time. I'm taking that headband."

Izuku sets his jaw determinedly. His eyes flit over the other team. Todoroki. Iida. Yaoyorozu. Kaminari.

Wait. Kaminari?

Oh. Oh *shit.* He knows *exactly* what Todoroki is planning.

"Emergency evacuate!" he yells in warning to his team before *pulling* them as fast and far away as he can. And it's not a moment too soon. Just as they've cleared range, Yaoyorozu pulls an insulation sheet over her teammates as Kaminari discharges, stopping everyone nearby in their tracks so that Todoroki can firmly freeze them to the ground. Then he snatches their headbands for good measure before Iida puts on a burst of speed to approach Izuku's team again.

A wall of ice shoots up in front of Izuku, cutting off their escape. A mini arena of ice forms all around the two teams, preventing them from pulling away. Izuku tsks. Shoji is strong, but not strong enough to punch through layers of ice. Maybe Sato could have done it, but Izuku had prioritized mobility and situational awareness over raw firepower when forming his team, after all. He can use One For All if it comes down to it, but he needs to keep as many limbs in working order for as long as possible, as this isn't even the last event. Considering that...

"We have two options," he says quickly to his team before Todoroki gets too close. "We can try to get out of here and keep running away in open space, like we originally planned. But it'll be risky because Team Todoroki won't let us go that easily, and looking for an opening while also keeping away from them is not going to be easy. Not to mention that we'll also have to deal with all the other teams even if we do manage to get out. The second option is staying here until time runs out. We'll be under Todoroki's concentrated attack, but we also don't have to worry about any other teams. We can use this situation to our advantage."

Shoji nods. "Understood. I trust your judgement. It's your call, Midoriya."

"We're with you, Deku!" Uraraka confirms, and Hatsume hums in agreement.

Their easy faith in him makes something warm curl in Izuku's chest,

and it's not the ball of flames he's cradling against his chest.

He swallows. He can't afford to let them down.

Izuku eyes Team Todoroki who are approaching cautiously. Yaoyorozu's creation quirk is versatile and tricky to deal with. Kaminari's discharge can shock them in place. Iida's speed could follow them wherever they go. And Todoroki's ice is a formidable foe.

He considers his options. The risks. The gains.

He bares his teeth in a grin.

"Let's take them on."

*

"AMMMAZING!!! Team Midoriya has been evading all pursuers, but in that enclosed space Todoroki has set up, it's only a matter of time before the ten million switches place! Or so I thought until five minutes ago! But Midoriya has managed to keep away all this time, even in this small arena set up by his opponent!!!!"

Izuku can really tell that Present Mic is genuinely having a field day and not just playing up his excitement for the sake of entertaining the crowd.

Team Izuku has been staying on Todoroki's left, keeping Iida between them and both Yaoyorozu as well as Todoroki's right side at all times so they can't attack efficiently without harming Iida. Kaminari's discharge is indiscriminate so Team Todoroki has to pull the insulator sheet over themselves if he wants to use it, which also gives Team Izuku plenty of time to get out of range. And with those handicaps, they've been able to play this game of keep-away.

(Even in all their classes, Todoroki had only ever used the heat side of his quirk to defrost his ice. Never for anything more. Izuku had wondered, is still wondering why, but he can't focus on that now. At the moment, all he can afford to do is exploit it.)

With only about a minute left, Izuku can tell that their opponents are getting frustrated. Iida grits his teeth and seems to say something to

Todoroki. Then his engines glow blue, and suddenly Team Todoroki is *past* Izuku.

“What—?!”

Izuku whirls around, a hand flying up to check his forehead.

Nothing’s there.

“OOOOOHHH, look what we have here! The ten million has finally switched hands! Or rather, heads!” Present Mic screams delightedly.

Iida grins at them over his shoulder, and Izuku is impressed despite himself. To have kept a move like that secret from them all this time only to use it at the last moment...

But then again, no one can measure up to Izuku when it comes to keeping secrets about quirks.

“Twenty seconds left!” Present Mic calls out gleefully.

“Shoji,” Izuku calls softly as he prepares himself. “Be ready to catch me.”

“Midori—?!”

Izuku takes a page out of Bakugo's book and leaves his alarmed teammates behind in a burst of speed as he *pulls* himself towards the wall of ice right next to Team Todoroki. Thanks to Uraraka making him weightless, he flies like a bullet.

In that short span of a moment, his mind is in overdrive.

Todoroki has placed their headband around his neck, but there’s no telling which one it is. Izuku can only pull one thing at a time, and if he tries pulling them one after the other Todoroki would clue in and just hold onto them. So pulling the headbands is out of the question.

He needs to grab them with his own hands.

And as for interference...

Quirk analysis is Izuku’s specialty. He sees Iida’s engines sputter and die out. A powerup like that is bound to have a heavy risk or penalty. It looks like his engines are completely shot for the moment, rendering the entire team immobile.

That means he only has to worry about dealing with Todoroki.

Izuku is right on top of the other team now. He plants a foot on Iida's shoulder (the bespectacled boy yelps in surprise) (sorry, Iida) and grasps his right hand toward Todoroki's throat with One For All charging through it.

Just like a microwave. Don't let it burst. Don't let it hurt. Don't let it hurt *him.*

Todoroki's mismatches eyes are opened wide in alarm as he brings up his left arm. Flames swirl around his arm and Izuku grits his teeth in anticipation of the burn, but then Todoroki *freezes.* The flames die out in a blink.

Izuku uses his moment of distraction to push aside his arm and grab all the headbands around his neck.

He kicks off Iida's shoulder as soon as he has them, narrowly avoiding Yaoyorozu trying to grab him, and *pulls* himself away.

"Shoji!" he calls as he flies backwards.

Even if they have their headband (and more), it'll all be for nothing if Izuku hits the ground and gets disqualified. He doesn't have a way to counter his pull mid air, so he's literally taking a leap of faith. (Maybe he could use the push of his fire to change direction, but—he can't. Not with his mother watching.)

And his trust proves to have been justly placed when he feels tentacles wrap around him, enveloping him in a tight yet careful hold.

Izuku grins down at his teammates.

"Good catch."

Shoji sighs in exasperation, but the mouth on the end of one tentacle is grinning right back.

"Uraraka did say we won't let you down, didn't she?"

"I didn't know she meant it literally!" Izuku laughs.

"TIME'S UP!!!!" Present Mic announces through their relieved joy. "Now shall we see who our top four are?! In first place, not only did they take back their ten million but a literal handful of other headbands just to rub it in! Team Midoriya!"

“Yes!”

Their team cheers, Shoji lifting Izuku high up into the air. He laughs.

“Thanks so much, you guys. I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Uraraka beams up at him. “What are you saying?! It’s thanks to *you!”*

“A team effort, then,” one of Shoji’s mouths grins as he keeps Izuku wrapped in his tentacles, still holding him high above their heads.

Izuku grins, but then he finally notices all the gazes and cameras pointed their way. He blushes.

“Um. Shoji. Could you let me down? And Uraraka, could you return my gravity? Please?” Izuku asks in a small voice, face pink as he squirms awkwardly.

His two teammates look at each other, then break into identical mischievous grins.

“Nope!” Uraraka cheerfully informs him, popping the “p”.

“Sorry. We promised not to let you down, after all!”

And then they proceed to run around the arena in a victory parade while still holding Izuku over their heads like some kind of living, squirming trophy. Izuku squawks in embarrassment and protest, but eventually ends up joining their laughter with a pink face.

Hatsume gives them a long unreadable look, then whips out a notebook and starts furiously scribbling in it.

“Mido-bunny-tentacle-burrito... ooooh, this is giving me *so much* inspiration...”

*

Uraraka and Shoji only let Izuku down once they’re at the mess hall, and lunch is a rowdy event nestled between his classmates. Plenty of congratulations and encouragements go around the table. By the end of the cavalry battle there had been only four teams with any headbands at all, making Team Midoriya, Bakugo, Shinso, and

Todoroki advance to the final stage of the Sports Festival.

Izuku smiles at Iida.

“That move you used at the end was really impressive, Iida!”

Iida adjusts his glasses, trying not to show it but clearly pleased by the praise.

“I call it Recipro Burst. And I am glad that it made an impression, although ultimately you exploited its weakness. You deduced that I wasn’t able to move afterwards, correct?”

“Ah, yes.”

“As expected of you, Midoriya.” Iida sighs. “I understand why Uraraka and the others wanted to be on your team and help you. I wanted the same thing as well. But... I also wanted to become independent of you. I realized that I’ve been relying on you too much. While having faith in your comrades is essential, dependence will only hamper everyone. That’s why I joined Todoroki’s team and challenged you. So that I wouldn’t just be reliant on you, but become someone that *you* can rely on.”

“Oh, Iida,” Izuku whispers. His heart feels like it’s in his throat, hurting for his friend and feeling so *blessed* at the same time.

What did he do to deserve friends like these?

“Of *course* I rely on you. That’s why I asked *you* to get reinforcements. Because I knew you wouldn’t let us down.”

Iida smiles gratefully at Izuku’s words, and Izuku smiles back. But then, he frowns.

“Wait. Let me take that back and use another phrase. I swear, if someone uses that as an excuse to carry me around like a trophy on live television again...”

His classmates are roaring with laughter around him. Izuku (too used to years of abuse and bullying) had been immune to most of the jokes that the pranksters of the class had sprung on him, and now Uraraka and Shoji are getting pats on the back and thumbs up for finally managing to ruffle his feathers. The two take the praise with unapologetic grace, making Izuku groan good-naturedly.

Todoroki quietly steps up behind Izuku and taps his shoulder amongst the chatter.

“Midoriya. I’d like a private word, if you’re done eating.”

Izuku blinks.

This is the person who declared war on him without a care that their entire class was watching, after all. If someone as indifferent as Todoroki wants privacy, then this really must be something.

“Sure, I guess...?” Izuku says as he rises from his seat. Todoroki nods his thanks and turns to lead him away from the mess hall.

“We don’t have much time before lunch break is over! Make sure not to be late!” Iida calls after them and Uraraka shoots Izuku a worried look. Izuku just waves back at them and follows Todoroki.

Once they’re in a secluded hallway, Todoroki leans back against a wall and puts his hands in his pockets. Izuku takes place opposite of him, not sure what this is about. Todoroki had already thrown down the gauntlet, and he doesn’t seem like the petty type, so what else could he want to say?

After a brief pause as if collecting his thoughts, Todoroki starts speaking.

“I originally wanted to talk to you as soon as the cavalry battle ended, but Uraraka and Shoji whisked you away too fast,” he begins with a perfectly straight face. But Izuku’s feels like it’s burning again from the remembered embarrassment.

“During the obstacle course and the cavalry battle, I noticed that you kept a hand against your chest but that you weren't coughing anymore. I said before that I’m stronger because my quirk doesn’t rebound as much as yours, but it looks like you’ve already found a way around it. And not only that, but..”

Todoroki frowns.

“Neither Iida, nor Kaminari, nor Yaoyorozu, nor Shoji, nor Uraraka felt it. Only I did. I was the only one of us who saw All Might’s fight with the Nomu at the USJ, after all. And in that last moment... I felt from you what I felt from All Might.”

Izuku is frozen. Todoroki had already unbalanced him once before,

mentioning All Might when he'd declared war against Izuku. But he'd never thought that his watered-down version of One For All could feel similar to All Might.

He thinks back to the USJ. By the time All Might had arrived, he'd been too high on nerves, hormones, and instincts to really have a clear head, but he does remember what happened. Shortly after All Might had arrived, a few of his classmates like Bakugo, Kirishima, and Todoroki had also come to the plaza. Izuku had been too busy holding onto Aizawa then and thus no one had seen him use his flames or One For All, so he'd never thought anyone would notice. Besides, they were all too engrossed with All Might's epic battle.

To think that Todoroki would link All Might's One For All with Izuku's... just how perceptive is this guy?

Todoroki lifts his head and looks Izuku in the eye.

"Are you All Might's illegitimate child or something?"

...Izuku takes it back.

Perceptive my ass.

And Izuku can't help it. He *laughs.*

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Izuku recognizes that it's a logical and plausible deduction. But to him, it's just so bizarre. So he *laughs,* and he laughs and he laughs and he laughs, because he doesn't know how else to choke out the broken glass shattering inside him. And in his head, Hisashi laughs with him.

"If only life was so kind," Izuku manages to gasp out.

But life isn't kind. It's not even fair.

Hisashi laughs in agreement.

'Like father, like son. But he is not your father.'

Izuku knows. He *knows.*

He grins up at a bewildered Todoroki in a baring of teeth that looks like it hurts.

"Sorry, but was that all?"

Todoroki looks at him for a long moment before he shakes his head and seems to centre himself.

"...No. Whatever it is, you have a connection to All Might. That's all I need as a reason to beat you. And you alarmed me enough with your strength that I almost used the fire side of my quirk when I vowed never to use it offensively. Because... You must know about my father, Endeavor."

And from that point, all of Izuku's dark humour vanishes as he listens to a story that has *no right* being as familiar as it is.

"He's been the number two hero forever. Whatever he did, it was never enough to measure up to the living legend that is All Might. And because he knew that, he devised a plan."

Todoroki pauses, working his jaw, then continues on with a purposefully blank expression.

"You know about 'quirk marriages,' right? The outdated and barbaric practice of choosing mates solely to enhance the next generation's quirk. With the means and merits he had, he easily integrated himself into my mother's family and took possession of her quirk. All so that he could raise a hero to surpass All Might and claim it as his own victory."

He raises his hand to cover the left side of his face. His scar.

"In my memories, my mother is always crying. She told me that my left side is ugly... and dumped boiling water on me."

And Izuku can't *breathe.*

"The reason I aim to beat you is as a personal triumph. I won't use my father's quirk. I'll become number one without *needing* to. And that is my total disavowal of him," Todoroki finishes.

But Izuku still can't breathe.

He's wondered, of course, why Todoroki never used his heat except to melt the ice he'd created. (Just like Izuku himself only pushes out his fire to negate the backlash of his pull, he realizes.)

But he hadn't thought much about it.

He hadn't thought it would the same reason as himself.

I won't use my father's quirk, Todoroki had said.

I won't use your quirk, Izuku's memories echo. *I won't be like you.*

Hisashi *laughs.*

'It's as I've always said, boy. Like father, like son.'

He chokes on something that's too wretched to be laughter and too harsh to be a sob.

"What is it with abusive fathers with fire quirks?" slips out before he can stop himself. It's barely a whisper, but in this quiet, secluded hallway, Todoroki is able to hear it with unmistakable clarity.

His mismatched eyes widen.

"Wait, what...? Does that mean you too—"

The sound of Present Mic announcing the end of lunch break resounds through the speakers. Izuku swallows thickly to ground himself and pushes off the wall he'd come to lean on. He turns away from Todoroki to head toward the stadium.

"Midoriya—" Todoroki calls, reaching out, but Izuku catches the hand sharply before it can fall on his shoulder.

"We'll be late," he says curtly, not even turning around to face the other boy. His voice sounds odd even to himself, and maybe he's using this as an excuse to run away, but he just can't— he *can't.*

He abruptly drops Todoroki's hand and steps away.

The boy keeps his hand lingering in the air as if still reaching out for Izuku. But Izuku can't see that because he's too busy trying to desperately keep the shattering shards of his mind and heart together.

Izuku had never really *liked* Endeavor—his methods were too aggressive and calculating to garner Izuku as a true fan—but he'd respected him. He'd looked up to him. He'd watched him. He'd seen him as a symbol.

When he was trying to get over his pyrophobia, he'd made himself look at video clips of Endeavor for hours and hours on end and told himself *look, fire doesn't always hurt. It can do good too.*

But now he knows better.

His back *burns.*

Izuku looks down at his left palm. He'd been holding his flames in his hand, letting it out and yet hiding it from view. The insides of his fingers and palm are pink with a light first-degree burn.

He'd been so proud of finding a way to lessen the handicap of his quirk.

He'd wondered if *Aizawa* would be proud.

But now, the thought that he'd been willingly pushing out the flames makes him *sick.*

He'd known. He'd already *known* that this fire is tainted. This is his father's fire after all, and it made his mother *scream.* But he'd also thought that it was only *Hisashi* that was the problem.

Izuku had looked up to Endeavor as a hero who uses fire for good. He had looked up to him as everything Hisashi wasn't. But now, after hearing that he's no better than Hisashi...

It feels like his world is burning down.

Chapter End Notes

IZUKU HEADBANG

I just love class 1-A. Like, all of them. (Except Mineta, but he technically isn't at this point, so.)
If it looks like there's more interaction with the entire class than in canon, it's the result of my self-indulgent heart not being able to contain itself.

Burning Bridges

Chapter Notes

I now have a Tumblr under the username owhitekiwibird (changed to: crowbird-kamakse). I have no idea how to use it, but hey, it's there.
More importantly, I now have FAN ART!!!!
Everyone please do yourselves a favour and check them out, and give these blessed, blessed angels a round of applause. Or rather, an Izuku headbang. Yeah. Let's do it together. *Izuku headbang gang*
-
Izuku burrito by Kyotokiki: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/173910927419/kyotowolfberg-i-drew-these-cuties-for

Izuku in uniform and costume by HarukoWitch: https://m.imgur.com/6AKdBys & https://m.imgur.com/NXuacwU

Thank you so, so much again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next and final event of the Sports Festival is a one-on-one combat tournament. Ojiro and a student from Class B who were on Shinsou's team decide to sit out on the bases that they have no memory and thus no right. After a bit of shuffling Tetsutetsu and Shiozaki from Class B take their places, and then it's time for recreation before the actual tournament.

Izuku feels several pairs of eyes on him, like Todoroki—whose gaze is now decidedly far less hostile and seems to want to talk to Izuku again, but *Izuku* can't talk to him, not now, not when he's desperately trying to hold together, so he purposefully averts his gaze—and Bakugo— *why?* —and some of his friends like Uraraka and Iida who are shooting him worried looks, but he ignores them.

Instead, Izuku spends his time with Ojiro in a private room, listening to his experience with Shinsou Hitoshi from general education who is his first opponent.

It's a welcome distraction.

It also feels like *running away,* something that Izuku has *never* done

before.

Izuku had never run from the actual Hisashi. But the very idea of him, everything he represents, and seeing him in someone he looked up to is enough to make Izuku hide tail and *run,* and that fact alone makes him sick on so many levels.

It's with slightly unsteady feet that Izuku walks down to the stadium for the first match. And so when he hears the familiar voice of his hero right before the exit to the stadium, he almost *winces.*

"My boy!" All Might calls out, and now more than ever it reminds Izuku of Hisashi's harsh bark of *"boy!"*

But this isn't Hisashi. This isn't even Endeavor.

It's All Might.

The grin on All Might's gaunt face and whatever he'd been about to say dies as he faces Izuku. He takes one look at Izuku's face, and Izuku has no idea what he sees there, but the next moment the man is crushing Izuku against his thin frame.

Izuku gasps against All Might's chest. His eyes are dry, his hands are shaking, and he's still not used to physical contact like this—Inko had often been too afraid that she might worsen Izuku's injuries to touch him—but he still reaches out and grabs fistfuls of All Might's shirt with trembling hands.

"All— All Might," he manages. The man squeezes him in return, blessedly not asking any questions but silently offering comfort and support. And that— *that's* what breaks through the fog in Izuku's mind.

"What does it mean to be a hero?" he whispers.

It slips out before Izuku can stop himself. He feels ridiculous, like a child whining at his parent for one last bedtime story or to check under the bed for monsters or something—which Izuku had never actually done, because he already *knew* where the monster was; and he shouldn't even *dare* think of *All Might* as his *father*— but before he can extract himself from the embrace he clearly doesn't deserve and apologize, All Might gives him another squeeze and keeps him in place.

"I've said it before, my boy." *My boy,* Izuku notes anew. "A true hero

is someone who saves not only lives, but what's here too." He splays a large hand on Izuku's upper back, right behind his heart, unknowingly covering his scars. The warmth of All Might's hand somehow seeps through and penetrates the burning phantom pain.

"And remember. You have already saved me."

Present Mic calls for Izuku's entrance. All Might ducks his head from on top of Izuku's head to whisper in his ear.

"And I said this before too, but remember it as well. Whatever happens out there, I am *so proud* of you."

He finally gives Izuku one last squeeze before letting go and gently pushing him towards the exit. Izuku stumbles forward from the momentum, then keeps walking until he's out of the tunnel and in the open arena.

"WEEEEEELCOME to the first match of the tournament!! Let's see the lineup, shall we? First off! Some people saw him on the news last year as the guy who tried to save his friend from a villain. Some people know him as the first student in *years* to enter the UA heroic department with a triple digit score. But we ALL know that he's part of Class 1-A who faced off villains and came out victorious, and we ALL know that he came out top dog in not only the first, but also the second event of the Sports Festival! Will his winning streak last for the final event? Everyone, give a round of applause for MIDORIYA IZUKU!!"

Izuku winces as the stadium explodes.

He's used to having negative attention on him. Hell, he's good at purposefully *bringing* negative attention to himself and away from someone else. But he's never had this much *positive* attention. Coupled with All Might's—dare he say— *affectionate* encouragement, this is... overwhelming, to say the least.

Especially with the memory of Hisashi still swirling around like murky water in his head.

"And facing against him is the only kid from general education! But other than that, sorry, nothing eye-catching or noteworthy at the moment! SHINSOU HITOSHI!!"

The difference in their introductions is stark to the point of being brutal.

The finer details of the tournament are explained. One side must be pushed out of bounds of the ring, be rendered unable to move, or say something conceding defeat.

Present Mic hasn't even given the signal to start before Shinsou is already making his move.

"'I give,' huh... You get it, don't you, Midoriya? This is a battle to test the strength of your heart. If you have a strong vision for the future, you can't afford to save face on how you go about it. That dumb monkey talked about pride and whatnot, but—"

"REAAAAAAADY—"

"Don't you think he's an idiot for throwing his chance away like garbage?"

"START!!!"

The signal is given, but a resounding silence rings around the arena for a moment.

Izuku stares at Shinsou who's staring—almost glaring—back at him.

Ojiro had warned Izuku about Shinsou's quirk, speculating that answering the boy's question puts anyone under his control. It looks like Shinsou had figured Izuku would already be warned and is willing do or say anything he can to get under Izuku's skin and make him talk regardless.

And while those words anger Izuku, he's also had *years* of experience silently taking all verbal and physical abuse thrown at him. He'd never been able to stand someone *else* being hurt, but it's only himself who can hear Shinsou's malicious words at the moment.

So he narrows his eyes and silently takes a step forward.

The other boy seems to get a little urgent as Izuku wordlessly steps closer. His easy stance tenses and his words quicken.

"But what about you? That was quite the intro from Present Mic! First place in the entrance exam, the obstacle course, and the human cavalry? You must have been blessed with some amazing quirk."

And Izuku *stops dead.*

Shinsou continues, looking almost gleeful at the fact that his words

have found purchase on Izuku.

“What is it? Telekinesis? It sure must feel great to have a power like that. No wonder you’re first place in everything. But in my case, there was no gateway to success, not with a quirk like this! Every time someone hears about it, they say it’s a *villain’s quirk!* Do you know how that feels? Of course you don’t! Someone born with a perfect quirk like you will never understand!”

By this point, it looks like Shinsou himself has lost some control. In trying to rile Izuku up, he himself has been riled up.

And with thoughts of Todoroki’s revelations, Shinsou’s words of “a villain’s quirk,” Inko’s screams, Hisashi’s laughter, and the memory of the burn burn *burn* swirling inside his head, Izuku can’t— he *can’t.*

He breaks.

Izuku laughs out loud, burying his face in his hands. His burned left palm stings at the pressure, but he doesn’t even care. He’s ceased caring about physical pain a long time ago. He laughs like choking out broken glass, and finally he lifts his head to meet Shinsou’s eyes.

He bares his teeth in something that’s too savage to be a grin but too broken to be a snarl.

“My quirk made my mother scream.”

And his mind goes blissfully blank.

*

Shinsou gulps as he stares at Midoriya.

The boy has a blank expression on his face, just like he’s seen countless times before, proof that he’s under Shinsou’s control.

But for some reason, those big green eyes that are staring right at him still manage to look accusing. *Hurt.*

Shinsou swallows thickly again. He’d lost his cool, facing off a kid who he’d thought had been born with everything he hadn’t. He admits it was only partly a desperate attempt to get Midoriya to talk and

partly genuine frustration and envy.

But when Midoriya laughed and talked, for some reason, he'd been intimidated.

He'd felt like he'd overstepped and done something terrible.

Shinsou grits his teeth. It's just like he's told Midoriya—he can't *afford* to save face or hesitate, not with a quirk like his own. So he makes an effort to banish the creeping feeling in his gut that feels uncomfortably like *guilt* and harshly barks an order to Midoriya.

"Turn around and walk out of bounds."

Midoriya, still blank-faced, starts to do as he's told. He turns around and takes step after step towards the edge of the arena. For some reason, Shinsou relaxes as he confirms that his mind-control is working as it should.

But just one step from the edge, Midoriya *stops.*

He plants both feet on the ground with his back to Shinsou. He seems to stare at the entrance of the tunnel leading out of the stadium. Then, slowly, his head turns to the side to look up at the relay base where Present Mic should be.

And ever so slowly, his head turns even more to look at Shinsou over his shoulder.

How?

He's frozen as he meets Midoriya's green, green gaze.

And then something *explodes.*

*

Ojiro had told him that he can't remember anything during the time he was under Shinsou's mind-control, but for some reason, after a brief moment of blissful blankness, Izuku can't do anything *but* remember.

He remembers his mother's broken sobs of *"I'm so sorry."* He

remembers her *scream* when she first saw his flames.

He remembers Hisashi's cruel sneer as he raised his hand. He remembers the chilling laugh as the man had breathed the words that branded themselves on his beating heart: *"like father, like son."*

He remembers Todoroki covering the left side of his face—his *scar*—and vowing the all too familiar promise of *"I won't use my father's quirk."*

He remembers dreaming of burning wings as he falls for having dared reach for the sun.

But then, he remembers the hologram of Uraraka when he was admitted to UA. *"He saved me,"* she had said, and her words had sounded like salvation. *"I won't let you down,"* she had also said, thanking him and promising him at the same time.

He remembers Iida talking about the USJ and how he depended on Izuku. *"I want to be someone you can rely on,"* he'd confessed.

He remembers No. Thirteen telling them that every quirk has the potential to harm, but also to save. *"Your quirks emphatically do not exist to hurt others,"* they had assured.

He sees All Might poking his head out of the entrance of the tunnel.

"I'm so proud of you," his hero had whispered in Izuku's ear as he crushed him in a hug. *"Remember. You have already saved me."*

He slowly moves his unresponsive body to look towards the relay booth where Aizawa is.

"Thank you," his other hero had said while patting Izuku's head. *"You saved me and All Might with your fire, Midoriya. You did good. Don't forget that."*

He remembers.

And Izuku feels like a downright *idiot.*

He would laugh if he could.

But at the moment, it's all he can do to crane his neck over his shoulder to look Shinsou in the eye.

He also remembers the things the boy had said, almost screamed out

in rage and frustration. *"No gateway to success,"* he had said. *"You'll never understand."*

"A villain's quirk."

And despite whatever Shinsou thinks, Izuku *does* understand. More than that, he *empathizes.*

Shinsou is hurting. And Izuku... well. He's never been able to leave someone in need of help.

It's that thought that gives him the final push of willpower to break free of Shinsou's control.

One For All courses through him and Izuku flicks two fingers on his left hand. The force of its 100% shatters his fingers and lets out an explosion of wind powerful enough to knock him completely out of Shinsou's control.

He turns fully to face Shinsou once more. The boy is gaping.

"How... you shouldn't have been able to move at all in the first place, let alone get out of the mind-control! What did you do?!"

As if Izuku is going to answer him again.

Shinsou seems to have the same thought as his face takes on a desperate look.

"So you have that much power in just your fingers? Count me jealous!"

Izuku steps forwards.

"People like me are born with a villain's quirk, and people like you have the perfect hero's quirk!"

He closes the distance between them.

"Even so, I can't help dreaming about being a hero! But I've never even been given a chance! How is that fair?"

They're only a few steps apart.

"—Damn it, *say* something! Or am I not even worth—"

Izuku grabs Shinsou's collar and arm and *throws* him over his head.

The boy lands on his back with an *oof,* coughing as the wind is knocked out of him. Izuku stands near his head and peers down at him, baring his teeth.

“I’d say you’ve talked your share. Now it’s your turn to listen.”

Shinsou glares up at Izuku and struggles to get up.

“Why would I—”

Izuku kicks Shinsou’s stomach before he can finish the question. The blow isn’t strong enough to send him flying, but it’s just enough to make him double over and cough. More importantly, it’s enough to cut him off.

For some reason, Izuku feels calm. Everything Todoroki said, everything Shinsou said doesn’t feel like it’s breaking him apart anymore. It’s a strange sensation, this calm, but it’s also familiar. Izuku had felt it every time he stepped between Hisashi and his mother, every time he stepped between Bakugo and a crying child, when he stepped between the slime villain and Bakugo, when he stepped between the zero-point bot and Uraraka, when he took Thirteen’s place to lead his classmates against Kurogiri, and when he faced off Shigaraki to save Aizawa.

It’s a kind of lull on his mind that makes everything else reorient itself. All the fear, panic, and pain fades away and leaves the only important thing at the moment: the need to *save* someone.

Shinsou probably doesn’t even *want* to be saved. Not by Izuku, at least. But damned if he’s going to give up because of that. After all, Izuku has been told all his life that he *can’t,* but that has never stopped him.

He uses the window where Shinsou is too busy coughing to ask a question to strike first.

“Let’s start with what you said in the beginning. You said something about not saving face to realize your goals, was it?”

“I’m the one asking questions—”

“Nope,” Izuku informs him with another kick to Shinsou’s stomach. This time, it’s hard enough to make Shinsou dry heave. *“Listen,* for once. Now, going back to what I was saying. I don’t get what you mean by it. You want to be a hero, right? Then the means *always*

matter as much as the ends."

Shinsou wipes the spit and bile off his chin and struggles to his feet, and Izuku lets him.

"If you forgo the means for the ends, *that's* what makes you no better than a villain. *Not* your quirk."

Shinsou freezes. His mouth is open, as if he was about to say something, but no sound comes out. But then he grits his teeth and glowers.

"How would *you* kn—"

Izuku sweeps Shinsou's legs out from under him before he can form a question again. The boy lands on his back and Izuku is crouching by his head in a flash, his right hand covering Shinsou's mouth and pushing his head back into the ground while he raises his left hand to his mouth, putting a broken finger to his lips.

"Shh. I'm not done talking yet."

Shinsou looks up at Izuku as if he's crazy, his eyes fixated on the almost grotesque purple hue of Izuku's shattered finger against his pink lips and bared teeth.

Izuku lifts his hand from Shinsou's mouth experimentally. The boy swallows, swivel his eyes around, then tries to provoke Izuku again.

"What if I forfe—?"

Izuku slaps his hand over Shinsou's mouth again.

"Oh, no you don't. You don't get to even *fake* forfeiting on me. You wanted life to be *fair,* didn't you? Well, you spewed what you wanted to say. It's only *fair* that you listen to what *I* have to say too, no?"

And he laughs.

Because life *isn't* fair, and it certainly isn't *kind.*

"And I *know,"* Izuku breathes, "because *I actually inherited a villain's quirk."*

At that, Shinsou's eyes snap up to Izuku's. His normally drooping eyes are wide with surprise, and Izuku feels like he's ripping out and baring his soul to him. Izuku has *never* said this to anyone, not his friends,

not Aizawa, not even All Might, but Shinsou is the first and only person who *needs* to hear this.

Izuku smiles, and even to him it feels broken.

“I inherited a villain’s quirk,” he says quietly. “I hated it. It hurt me, and it made my mother *scream*. And believe me, I wished I was rather *quirkless*. But… but then, I used that quirk to try to save someone. And they… they *thanked* me.”

He lets go of Shinsou and stands up. The boy stays frozen for a moment before also getting to his feet, warily eying Izuku as if expecting him to kick or throw him again at any moment. He doesn’t even try to open his mouth anymore.

He’s *listening*.

Good.

“Don’t you get it? No matter what kind of quirk it is, no matter who it came from… It’s not the quirk, but how you use it. It’s not the quirk, but you. So let me ask you.”

Izuku looks Shinsou straight in the eye.

“What have *you* been doing?”

Shinsou gulps. His eyes are wide as he stares back at Izuku’s unforgiving green eyes that seem to be boring into his soul.

He instinctively takes a step back.

A whistle blows.

“Shinsou is out of bounds! Winner, Midoriya!” Midnight shouts.

Shinsou whirls around. “What—?!”

“Aaaaand there you have it, folks! After delivering an absolutely SAVAGE beating, Midoriya is the first to advance to the second round!!” Present Mic confirms.

Shinsou looks down, and sure enough, he has stepped out of bounds. With his own two feet.

It’s exactly what he’d tried to get Izuku to do.

He looks up at Izuku with a strange face. Izuku grins at him and points a thumb to the stands around the stadium. Heroes and civilians alike are talking about Shinsou's quirk, about how useful it could be.

"Hear that?" Izuku says, bringing Shinsou's attention to himself again. "It's not the quirk, but how you use it."

And Shinsou looks like he's actually listening.

He stares at Izuku like he can't even believe him, then starts laughing.

"Don't tell me," he gasps as he clutches his side with a wince. Probably bruised from when Izuku kicked him. Twice. "You were actually trying to *help* me?"

Izuku shrugs. "You looked like you needed it."

Oh. Oh *shit.*

He's under Shinsou's control.

Shinsou grins at him and lets him go. "I can't even... you beat me up to stop me from asking questions, and now you answer without any apprehension?"

He pauses, then asks more quietly this time.

"Do you... do you really think a quirk doesn't define you?"

And that sounds too familiar to Izuku. He's asked himself the same thing thousands of times, after all. He'd never been able to give himself a definite answer.

But when someone else asks, he is able to grin for them.

"Well, *I* beat you up without even using *any* quirk, didn't I?"

Oh, *shit.*

Shinsou laughs again, once again releasing Izuku from his control.

"I guess you did. And Midoriya..."

He has a peculiar expression on his face. But soon, he *smiles.*

"Thanks."

That single word leaves Izuku breathless.

As Shinsou walks off the arena, Izuku swallows thickly. Then he turns his head to scan the crowd.

There. Todoroki is watching him, just like he had been for the past few days. But unlike before, his eyes are... different. Reaching out, in a way. Longing, even. Maybe even wistful.

Izuku said before that Shinsou is the first and only person who needs to hear this, but he was wrong. There's one more person who's hurt and in need of Izuku's help too.

Todoroki needs him.

...And yet...

*

Despite Izuku having absolutely thrashed Shinsou around the arena, it's actually Izuku himself who's worse off between the two of them. Shinsou is bruised and battered, but despite him not being able to lay a single finger on Izuku, he's only given some bandages and bruise cream while Izuku has to suffer Recovery Girl's disapproving look while she kisses him firmly on the cheek. One For All has absolutely shattered two of his fingers, after all.

After Recovery Girl patches him up, Izuku sits with Uraraka and Iida to watch the rest of the first round.

His heart plummets when Todoroki walks into the arena.

Just until a moment ago, Todoroki had been looking at Izuku like he wanted to reach out to him. There had been something—not quite friendly, perhaps, but a sense of hesitant kinship and closeness in his eyes. But now, as he's facing off Aoyama, there's nothing but ice cold fury.

The change is so absolute that Izuku panics. What could have happened in these few moments to change him so thoroughly? The only thing Izuku can think of would be if Todoroki met Endeavor and the man spouted his poisonous nonsense (which turns out to have

been the case).

While everyone else watches Todoroki embed Aoyama in a giant iceberg with awe, Izuku watches with dread.

Todoroki needs help.

He needs *Izuku's* help.

And yet...

Izuku is in turmoil as he watches the rest of the first stage.

Iida is played by Hatsume but still advances to the next stage.

But Uraraka goes against Bakugo, and she does not make it.

Izuku goes to prepare for his own match and finds her in the waiting room.

"Guess I lost, huh?" she smiles. "I told you I won't let you down, and I thought I could do it, but man..."

She keeps chattering with a bright smile, but Izuku is too familiar with the sensation of smiling through tears to be fooled. And while he's still not comfortable with physical contact, he can do this for her.

He kneels in front of Uraraka and takes her hands in his.

"Uraraka," he calls softly, gently cutting off her jumbled rambling. She abruptly falls silent.

Izuku remembers Aizawa's pat on his head. All Might's hug.

He looks her in the eye. "I am *so proud* of you."

Uraraka gasps. Her eyes shine, and soon tears swell up and spill over her cheeks. She laughs through her tears.

"That's— that's *so not fair,* Deku," she sobs. But she squeezes his hands as she breaks down and cries.

Because Uraraka is sitting in a chair and Izuku is kneeling in front of her, he can still see her face even though she has her head bowed down. She can't even cover her face because both her hands are still lightly enveloped in Izuku's, but she doesn't seem to mind.

Izuku stays there, kneeling in front of his sobbing friend and looking up into her face, holding her hands as she desperately clutches onto him, silently offering support and comfort. Eventually her sobs die down and Present Mic's voice rings over the speakers for the second stage of the tournament to begin soon.

Uraraka chuckles weakly and makes to extract her hands from Izuku's grasp.

"Guess that's you. You're up first, right? Better go, else you'll be late. Don't worry about me."

But Izuku catches her hands before she lets go. Uraraka looks down at him again, and Izuku looks up into her eyes. His voice is soft but firm.

"I mean it, Uraraka. I'm *so proud* of you. Don't forget that."

Her breath hitches again, but she gives him a watery smile that's sincere this time.

"I won't. And... *thank you."*

He smiles back, then slowly rises and leaves the room. He takes a few steps down the hallway before he hears Uraraka's voice again. She's probably on the phone.

Her voice is strong.

Izuku leaves her behind to walk forward.

And promptly meets Endeavor.

"Oh," the man says, literally looking down on him. "Here you were."

Izuku freezes.

Generally speaking, most people don't have any memories from when they were only three years old. But Izuku does.

He remembers the first time Hisashi slapped his mother, the first time he earnestly beat her, the first time he got locked in the broom cupboard, and the first time he stepped between his parents—he remembers it all with startling clarity.

He remembers how Hisashi had looked at him without seeing him.

Endeavor has the exact same eyes.

“I’ve watched your match. That’s an astounding quirk to be able to make such wind pressure with just the flick of a finger. In terms of raw power, it’s a quirk to rival All Might’s,” he says, pointing right into Izuku’s face.

Izuku stares up at the man.

He notices that he’s only ever talking about *quirks.*

Endeavor waits for a moment as if expecting Izuku to say something, but when he just keeps staring at him silently the man continues.

“My Shouto has a duty to surpass All Might. His match against you will be an excellent test. So do your best not to make a disgraceful match.”

And then he’s off with the slightest of farewells.

Izuku stays rooted on the spot for a moment more.

Shinsou needed help, so Izuku shoved aside all the panic and pain he’d been feeling and even talked about Hisashi being a villain.

Uraraka needed help, so Izuku ignored whatever reservations he had about physical contact and reached out for her.

Todoroki needs help. But Izuku…

If Izuku is to help Todoroki, truly help him, then he will need to use his fire.

But he can’t. Not because he won’t break his vow for the sake of helping someone, but because his mother is watching. And he can’t *do that.* He can’t do that *to her.*

But Todoroki needs his help.

He swallows thickly. He hesitates for a moment before he pulls out his phone. He scrolls with shaking fingers for the contact *The Sun,* and hastily types a message.

[What do you do when saving one person means hurting another?]

Thankfully, All Might responds promptly without even asking for details, though Izuku knows the man must be confused and worried by his out of the blue question.

[Try to lessen the damage as much as possible? Other than that...]

[Follow your heart.]

Follow your heart. Izuku mouths those words a few times. *Lessen the damage.*

He hesitates one last moment, because he *knows* how much this will worry her, but in the end, he makes the call.

“Mom,” he chokes out as soon as Inko picks up the phone. “Mom, I need you to trust me. *Turn off the tv.”*

*

Todoroki stands opposite to Midoriya on the arena.

He’s cooled down from his last meeting with Endeavor, now, and feels a little bad for going overkill on Aoyama. But he doesn’t regret it. He had to win one way or another, anyway. And no matter how much he wants to talk to Midoriya, (talk to him, ask him, reach out for him) he needs to win this match.

Talking to Midoriya can come later. But showing up his father...

His eyes involuntarily drift to the stands. Endeavor stands out even among the crowds, blazing his flames for the world to see. Todoroki’s eyes narrow—

“Todoroki. Who are you looking at?”

His eyes snap back to Midoriya. The other boy is looking at him with a peculiar expression.

Midoriya lets out a huff of laughter that’s devoid of any humour.

“To think a day would come where I empathize with *Kacchan,”* he murmurs, more to himself than Todoroki. Todoroki has no idea what Bakugo has to do with any of this, but Midoriya doesn’t elaborate so he brushes it aside for the moment and prepares himself.

Todoroki doesn’t know everything about his classmates’ quirks—take Iida, for example; he’d known the class president’s quirk was engines, but that Recipro Burst was a surprise—and he’s not exactly sure how Midoriya’s quirk even works. But he does know that he’s *fast.* Whatever rebound his quirk has, Midoriya seems to practically *fly* at times.

Todoroki has two chances. Catch Midoriya in his ice as soon as the start signal is given before he gets away, or wait for an opening when he’s slowed down by the backlash of his quirk.

But then again, it looks like Midoriya has found a way around the latter.

So that leaves only one choice.

“START!!!”

He stomps the ground with his right foot as soon as the signal is given, sending a wave of ice streaking towards Midoriya from all directions to cut off his escape.

But Midoriya doesn't even try to escape. Instead, he aims his right arm in front of him and braces it with his left, then flicks a single finger.

The blast shatters all the ice and the wind pressure even pushes Todoroki back. He might have been pushed back all the way out of the arena if he didn’t hastily form a wall of ice behind himself.

He narrows his eyes and raises one arm to shield himself from the wind. He’d felt this power once from Midoriya during the cavalry battle, and confirmed it during his first match. But it’s still unnerving to see so much power from just the flick of a finger.

Then he notices Midoriya. His face is calm and unmoved, if a bit blank compared to his normally kind air. But one finger of his right hand is utterly shattered, bent and bloody and rapidly turning into a ghastly purple. But his face betrays none of the pain.

A bemused breath of air escapes Todoroki. “You’re willing to get that injured just to...?”

But he grits his teeth and sends another wave of ice. And just like before, Midoriya smashes it apart with wind pressure from another finger. It happens a third time, and a fourth. Now all the fingers on Midoriya's right hand are broken, though you wouldn't know it from his face.

Todoroki grits his teeth and dashes towards him. He jumps off a shaft of ice towards Midoriya—

But Midoriya looks up at him and bares his teeth, and suddenly Todoroki is being *pulled* towards him with more speed than can be attributed to gravity.

"What—?!"

Before he can regain his balance, Midoriya's kick connects with his side *hard.* With the combined force of the momentum and the kick, Todoroki is sent sprawling.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Todoroki registers Present Mic and the crowd going wild. But he ignores it and focuses on Midoriya.

He coughs as he struggles to get up, and he hears Midoriya coughing as well. When Todoroki gets his footing again, Midoriya cocks his head at him.

"You didn't send ice at me but charged instead, even though I bet you're not as experienced in close combat as ranged. Does that have something to do with how you're shivering?"

Todoroki doesn't answer, but Midoriya doesn't seem to mind.

"When you talked to me before, in the waiting room and again at lunch, you said your quirk doesn't rebound as much as mine."

Midoriya shows Todoroki his left palm and fingers, which are more red and burnt than they'd been a moment ago. The bandages that were on his fingers have been burned away as well. He bares his teeth in a grin.

"Not as much, not *not at all."*

He's figured him out. Todoroki grits his teeth and pulls back while sending another wave of ice. But Midoriya smashes it again with the already broken fingers of his right hand.

“You won’t have any trouble if you use your fire to negate the cold, am I wrong? But you’re *still* handicapping yourself? For what? For pride? Defiance? Fear?”

Midoriya laughs, and it’s not a nice sound. Todoroki has never heard such a broken and harsh sound come from the normally kind and soft boy.

Actually, no, that’s not true.

He’s heard it when he’d talked to Midoriya about All Might and Endeavor. Midoriya had laughed then too, and it had sounded like shattering glass.

“Everyone is giving it their all,” Midoriya continues, and there’s something blazing in his green eyes. “Did you even see all the other matches? Everyone was giving their all. Their *best.* Shinsou tried his best even if the way he was going about it was a bit crooked. Uraraka gave it her all until she literally passed out. All the others held nothing back. They were doing their best. And you come here, saying you’ll only use half your power. Do you know how *insulting* that is to them?”

The jab finally gets a rise out of Todoroki.

“What are you trying to say?!” Todoroki explodes, sending another futile wave of ice that’s inevitably smashed. “I thought you'd *understand!”*

“Oh believe me, *I do,”* Midoriya shoots back, dodging shards of broken ice. “That’s why *I am here.”*

“Then why—!”

“Because it’s not your best!” Midoriya cuts him off in a roar. “Sure, maybe you can become *the* best with just half your power. But you won’t be *your* best. How many more people could you save if you use all your power and not cripple yourself? How many lives would a split second of hesitation cost? Why do you even *want* to be a hero?”

Todoroki freezes at that.

A half-forgotten memory of his mother clouds his mind.

“You want to be a hero, right? It’s okay, Shouto. You...”

His breath hitches, and he can't remember her next words.

Midoriya is looking at him with something like understanding.

"You don't want to use your quirk to disavow your father. I didn't want to use mine because I don't want to become like him. I get it. I do. But Todoroki..."

He smiles then, and it's a strange expression, like he himself doesn't quite believe what he's saying but he desperately *wants* to, and wants *Todoroki* to believe it too.

"It's not the quirk, but you. It's how you use it, even if it came from *him.* I... I promised not to use his quirk, but I also promised to become the best hero. And I can't do that without doing *my* best."

He looks straight at Todoroki.

"Neither can you."

Todoroki is left speechless. He had suspected that they might have similar situations, of course, when Midoriya had whispered despite himself about abusive fathers and fire quirks. And Midoriya still hasn't said anything outright, but he's said enough for Todoroki to understand.

To understand that he's baring his own wounds and scars to Todoroki.

For Todoroki.

"Why do you even care?" he whispers.

Midoriya grins, and this time, it's not as sharp or cutting as a knife.

"You reached out to me. You needed help. And besides," his voice is softer now.

"That's what heroes do."

And suddenly, Todoroki remembers. His mother had smiled down at him, and she had told him.

"It's okay, Shouto. You can be a hero."

Tears gather in Todoroki's eyes, and he feels something warm nestle in his chest and something hot explode from his left side. Flames cloak the left side of his body, and Todoroki stares at Midoriya who's

smiling.

"You... I can't even *believe* you," he says incredulously. But his eyes are still teary as he looks at Midoriya—at his *saviour*—and he chokes out his true wish.

"I... I also want to become a hero...!"

Midoriya grins.

"Good. So do I. Nice to finally meet you, *Shouto."*

And Todoroki... no, *Shouto* hears the soft voice of his mother calling his name overlap Midoriya's voice.

Midoriya huffs out a sigh and looks down at his hands, one a mess of burns and one a mess of broken bones and blood.

"You've literally been half-assing it. But I'm *worse,* because I've only been using a *quarter."*

And Todoroki doesn't understand exactly what he's saying, but Midoriya keeps talking, almost as if to himself.

"My pull is a quarter, and One... the super-strength is a half. I only ever used my pull freely, and never even used the remaining quarter except at the USJ."

He barks out a short laugh.

"We're a *disgrace* to the rest of our classmates. But that stops now."

Midoriya bares his teeth in a grin.

"I'm going to go at you with my all. And you'd better do the same."

Todoroki grins back at him.

"What do you think I'm doing? *You're* the one that *made* me use my all."

Midoriya laughs delightedly.

"I did, didn't I? I guess it's time I stop being a hypocrite and *push."*

He raises his chin.

“Not a just quarter, not a just half. This, is my *all.”*

The arena explodes in a violent burst of flames for the second time.

Unlike the shroud that's covering Shouto's left side, Midoriya's fire roars and curls around him, then finally forms a wreath at his back.

A blazing halo burns at Midoriya’s back. Except no, *not* a halo, Shouto realizes. Even as he watches in awe, the ring of flames at Midoriya’s back splits in the middle and unfurls, stretching to either side and branching out.

Not a halo, but *wings,* Shouto realizes.

Midoriya grins, the flames flickering behind him throwing his normally soft and kind face into sharp relief. He looks like a vengeful angel reigning among mortals.

“Shouto,” he calls, face free and grinning as if he doesn’t even know what an awestriking sight he is now. “Ready?”

Shouto swallows and charges up his ice and fire.

He wonders if Midoriya would let Shouto call him *Izuku.*

“Thank you,” he breathes just a moment before they collide.

The stadium explodes in a burst of light.

*

Izuku’s original quirk is a hybrid of pull and push, making either component half of his quirk. Add that to One For All, and One For All becomes half his entire power while his original quirk becomes the other half. Which makes each of the pull and push a mere *quarter* of his overall power.

He had never used all three parts—all his power—at the same time until now.

In the final moment, Izuku had been pushing out his flames, pulling himself forwards, and using One For All all at the same time. It felt... strangely cathartic.

Cementos had created several walls between him and Todoroki, but they all seem to have been shattered as Izuku can see the sky clearly.

Izuku is lying on his back, and somewhere near him he can hear the ragged pants of Todoroki.

"...You know," the other boy starts quietly. "When I was little, I watched a show on tv with my mother. All Might said that even if quirks are usually inherited, from the moment they're passed on, it's not the parents', but your own quirk."

And of course Izuku—being the hardcore fanboy he is—knows exactly what show he's talking about. Izuku turns his head, and finds Todoroki also on his back and looking at Izuku.

His eyes are clear.

"You told me that even if it's our father's quirk, what matters is how we use it. So... let *me* tell *you,* that even if we inherited it, it's *our power,* not our fathers'."

Izuku gasps. Then he laughs. And he still isn't comfortable with physical contact, but for some reason he gropes around blindly until his hand finds Todoroki's, and he grasps it tightly.

"Thank you."

They lie there looking up at the clear blue sky.

Izuku doesn't know if he's even within bounds or not. He doesn't even care.

Because just as he's already learned more than a decade ago, defeat can taste like victory.

+ Omake +

Izuku: (puts a hand on Shinsou's shoulder) (solemnly) Welcome to the Retching Wretches.

Shinsou:

Uraraka: (puts a hand on his other shoulder) (solemnly) Otherwise

known as the Puke Club, or the Bile Band, or the Thrower Uppers. Take your pick.

Shinsou:

All Might: (wiping blood off his chin with one hand and giving a thumbs up with the other) Don't worry. You'll get used to it.

Shinsou:

Chapter End Notes

I'm considering adding the tags #HugMight and #Patzawa. I've already added #Izuku Headbang.

Shinsou battle summary: Izuku pulls a Kaneki (Tokyo Ghoul' Ayato beatdown) on Shinsou. Then he Izuku's the heck out of him.

In chapter 2: All Might to Izuku "Do your best"
In chapter 9: Izuku to Shouto "*Be* your best"

Izuku: Even if you have your father's quirk, it's up to you to decide how to use it.
Todoroki: It's not even anyone else's quirk; it's your power.
= MUTUAL HEALING *Izuku headbang*

Loose Ends

Chapter Notes

MORE FAN ART
I HAVE BEEN BLESSED
(if you have art or whatnot, leaving the link/address really helps me post links... just saying.....)
rest_in_rip: https://rip-aizawa.tumblr.com/post/174037002909/so-how-about-that-burn-your-wings-chapter-huh
Izuku in sports wear by uzumuchi (love that you added the detail where BYW!Izuku's sleeves are long!): https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/174788925464/uzumuchi-i-have-been-reading-owhitekiwibirds

Also, a shoutout to RelleiDino who made this snippet of how the Todoroki vs. Aoyama fight (round 1) would have gone:
Poor Aoyama. I wonder if he got a chance to sparkle, at least.
Midnight: "Aoyama, can you move?"
Aoyama: "I sp-sparkle e-even mor-re whi-hile in i-ice!"
Midnight: "..."
Aoyama: "N-no. I c-can sp-sparkle b-but can't m-move."
Midnight: "Aoyama is unable to move! Todoroki is the winner!"
So good XD just had to make it canon. Thanks again for this and for agreeing to share!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Just as he's already learned more than a decade ago, defeat can taste like victory.

Except Izuku *hasn't* been defeated.

"Winner: Midoriya Izuku!" Midnight announces from somewhere nearby, and Izuku starts in surprise.

"What?"

He lets go of Todoroki's hand and tries get up but just ends up flailing around a bit, still on his back. He feels like a starfish. Or an upturned turtle. In the end, he doesn't make it up but manages to crane his neck enough to get a view of where he is.

The steam that had formed from the collision of the cold and hot forces is only now just starting to thin and Izuku is able to see where exactly he is.

Izuku finds himself just barely within bounds nearby where Midnight is standing (huh, that must be how she'd been able to see them through the steam) whereas Todoroki is just barely *out.* The heat of Izuku's fire has melted the ice braces Todoroki had made, resulting in Todoroki being blown back by the shock and wind pressure from their blows connecting with Cementos' walls. But Izuku had been *pulling* himself forwards, which is why they ended up on the same side of the arena. It looks like his pull was just enough to get him through the debris and still stay within bounds.

Which is almost funny, because winning had been the last thing on Izuku's mind at that moment.

Todoroki manages to get up first, seeing as his arms aren't a mess of burns and broken bones. He looks down at Izuku, and Izuku finds no hard feelings in his mismatched eyes. If anything, they look lighter and clearer than he's ever seen before.

There's a faint quirk in the corner Todoroki's lips, as if the ghost of a smile is hiding in it. He offers his hand to Izuku.

Izuku unthinkingly starts to reach out for it, then freezes before catching it.

There's just the slightest flicker in Todoroki's face. Izuku doesn't know *how* he knows, but he recognizes that Todoroki is hurt.

"No," he hurriedly reassures. "It's not you. It's just that I... the back of my clothes are torn up, and I can't... I can't show that." Much less on *live television.*

'The back of my clothes' is really putting it generously, because by this point all that's left of Izuku's P.E. uniform jumper and the shirt he'd been wearing under it are the chest and part of the right sleeve. The rest has been burned away by his flames or ripped off by One For All. Really, all he has are some scraps on his chest and a bit on his right arm.

Thankfully the steam has hidden them from sight till now, but it's starting to dissipate and Izuku can't afford to show his back all the more.

He doesn't say a word about the actual scars on his back, but just like Izuku somehow understood Todoroki's subtle facial expressions, Todoroki also seems to understand the words Izuku leaves unsaid. He blinks slowly, his eyes falling on Izuku's bare arms. It's the first time Todoroki has seen them this close, and even with blood, grime, and tatters of cloth covering them, quite a few scars are still visible on his arms.

Todoroki isn't dull. He's probably already made the connection between the scars on Izuku's bare arms and the reason he doesn't want to show his back.

The line of Todoroki's mouth tightens. But then he retracts his left hand and extends his right.

"Trust me," he says quietly.

To anyone else, Todoroki might look impassive. He might even look confident. But Izuku can hear the slight nervousness lingering in his voice, see the uncertainty in the twitch of his outstretched fingers, feel the subtle fear of being rejected in his mismatched eyes, and the willingness to risk being hurt despite all that.

Trust me, he had said. But it's actually Todoroki who's putting his trust in Izuku.

The magnitude of this simple gesture takes Izuku's breath away.

He can't help but take Todoroki's hand.

Todoroki's eyes lighten with relief and the corners of his lips curve slightly upwards. But other than that his expression remains the same as he sends a wave of coolness down their connected hands.

As Todoroki helps Izuku up, a thin layer of frost spreads from their joined hands and crawls up Izuku's left arm, across his shoulders, down his back, and all the way to his right arm.

Izuku turns his arm around and watches in fascination as a thin layer of frost glitters in the light, crinkling as he moves but icing over enough to keep his scars hidden as Todoroki sends a fresh wave of chilling power. It's like a second skin, or a thin shirt of ice.

"This is so cool," he breathes, pun not intended. Todoroki shrugs, but Izuku catches the faint dusting of pink on his cheekbones.

“Endeavor wears flames, after all. I used to play around with the idea of wearing ice.”

Izuku laughs. He feels light and heady, and while he normally might not have made light of something so sensitive like this, something in their shared moment loosens him up enough to be able to make a joke and give him the certainty that it’ll be alright.

“You already do. Doesn’t half your costume look like an icicle?”

Todoroki seems to be feeling the same way, seeing how he almost *playfully* pokes Izuku’s frosted shoulder as he replies easily.

“At least I don’t look like a rabbit.”

Izuku blinks at his comeback.

“Who looks like a rabbit?”

“You.”

“What?”

“…What?”

They stare at each other, Izuku not understanding and Todoroki not understanding how Izuku can *not* understand, until Midnight approaches and ushers them off the arena, telling them to go to Recovery Girl. Only then does the utter chaos of Present Mic and the crowd’s screaming register to Izuku, and he hastily obliges and steps into the tunnel leading indoors. The steam had kept them hidden from view earlier, and Todoroki’s ice covered his skin after that, but having worn long sleeves at all times for ten years makes him feel vulnerable with his arms and back bare.

He sighs in relief as the cool shadow washes over him, safely out of the public eye. He turns to look at Todoroki who is quietly following him.

“I’m going to go grab a shirt before going to see Recovery Girl,” he tells the other boy. Todoroki nods.

“I’ll come with you.”

Izuku doesn’t argue.

They walk quietly side by side. It’s strange how comfortable it feels

considering they've tried to beat the crap out of each other just a few moments ago, but everything else that happened before, during, between, and after that collision seems to be more than enough to tip the scales towards friendly kinsmanship than hostility.

It feels... nice.

But of course, before they even make it far, Endeavor finds them.

Because life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't *kind*.

Izuku feels Todoroki stiffen beside him. After all, even if they've had a breakthrough, Izuku knows better than anyone that a few words are nowhere *near* enough to erase years of abuse.

Endeavor looks like he hasn't even noticed Izuku, too focused on his son. The man is scowling fiercely at Todoroki, possibly for losing at the second stage of the tournament. He looks like he's about to open his mouth and say something.

Before he can, Izuku does the exact same thing he's always done when he'd found a tormentor and a victim.

He steps between them.

Izuku feels the surprised gaze of both Endeavor and Todoroki fix onto him.

Last time, Izuku had been too wrecked by the memories of his own father and wavering between Todoroki and his mother to even say a single word to Endeavor.

But this time, he has someone to protect. And Izuku has always been at his strongest when standing with someone to protect at his back.

He bares his teeth in a grin that's just a tad too sharp to be polite.

"Hello. I didn't get to introduce myself earlier." He hears Todoroki's sharp intake behind him at the revelation that they've met before. He keeps his sharp, sharp grin on his face as he faces Endeavor and the flames writhing around him.

Endeavor narrows his eyes at Izuku. The man is wholly focused on him and almost looks like he's flat out forgotten about yelling at his own son. Izuku feels the same satisfaction as that day when he'd successfully turned Hisashi's attention from Inko to himself.

"You," the man hisses. "You also have a fire quirk."

Of course that's what he's focused on. From what Todoroki told him, and from how the man had only talked about quirks when they first met, it looks like Endeavor has pride and almost an obsession with quirks.

In that case, Izuku knows exactly where to aim.

Izuku bares his teeth.

"I do." And he'd never thought the day would come when he'd say this, not to mention with a *smile* on his face, but— "So did my father."

He pauses for a beat to let it sink in, then goes in for the kill.

"Not as special as you thought it was, huh?"

And ohh, that looks like it *burns.*

He casually turns away from Endeavor's enraged face, dismissing him in favour of Todoroki.

Izuku had called the other boy "Shouto" almost without thinking during their match. It had been natural. But this time, it's as much a calculated move as the first time he had called Bakugo "Kacchan."

"Come on, *Shouto,"* he emphasizes. "We should hurry and get to Recovery Girl."

Todoroki stares at him with wide eyes for a moment before giving him a small nod. To his satisfaction, Izuku catches Endeavor almost gape in surprise and indignation at the familiar name and Todoroki's agreement out of the corner of his eye.

He gives Endeavor one last sharp grin before herding Todoroki around and away from him, keeping himself firmly between the two at all times.

They walk silently until they're reasonably far away. It's only then that Todoroki finally speaks up softly.

"...Thank you."

Izuku blinks.

"What for?" he asks, genuinely confused. In Izuku's point of view, he

hasn't done anything out of the ordinary.

But Todoroki is looking at him like he can't even believe him.

Unfortunately, they arrive at the locker room before Todoroki has a chance to explain. Izuku darts towards his bag and pulls out the few spare shirts he had packed.

He longingly fingers the long sleeved shirt he'd brought, but eventually sighs and picks up a sleeveless top. He has to get both his arms patched up, after all, so Recovery Girl is going to have to see his bare arms anyway. If he wears a long-sleeved shirt, she'll probably make him take it off completely. If he wears a sleeveless top, though, he might at least be able to keep the scars on his back from her scrutiny.

Besides, he's not even sure if he'll be able to cram his broken hand through the long sleeve anyways.

Izuku rubs a thumb over the sheen of ice on his upper body. He feels a little sorry to have to melt off this novel experience.

He should probably ask Todoroki to do it. He's not certain if he can do it without burning himself since he still doesn't have a good grasp on his fire and still has no clue when his fire burns him and when it doesn't. But...

He hears Todoroki shuffle closer and turns to find the boy right behind him, a hand hovering over his back.

"Let me," he says quietly, as if reading Izuku's mind. After all, even if they've both avoided using their fire quirks, Todoroki still has infinitely more experience in melting ice, at the very least.

But Izuku still hesitates, because for Todoroki to melt the ice, he'll have to keep a hand on Izuku, which means he'll be close enough to see the scars on Izuku's back.

He doesn't want to burden Todoroki with that sight.

But then again, for some strange reason—maybe it's the instant kinship forged between them—he doesn't want to hide anything from Todoroki either. Todoroki doesn't even have the choice to hide his own scar, after all.

"It's... not exactly pretty," he says hesitantly, and even without

outright saying it Todoroki somehow instantly recognizes that Izuku is talking about the scars on his back.

Todoroki blinks at him.

“Have you seen my *face?”* he asks incredulously, pointing at his own scar.

“But your face is still pretty,” Izuku argues even as he obediently turns and offers his back to Todoroki. Though behind him, Todoroki straight up freezes for some reason.

A long moment of frozen inactivity follows Izuku’s statement, and he’s just started wondering if he’s said something wrong when Todoroki finally jerks into action and lays his hand on Izuku’s back.

Warmth seeps through the cool layer of ice, melting it off in steam rather than water. Izuku shivers involuntarily as the not unpleasant sensation caresses his skin in gentle waves of steam, Todoroki’s left hand a constant warmth on his back.

The moment he hears Todoroki take a sharp intake, he knows he’s seen the scars on his back.

Izuku chuckles without any mirth.

“Told you it isn’t pretty.”

He hastily fumbles with the top in order to pull it on and relieve Todoroki from the ugly sight as soon as possible. But soon, another hand joins his as Todoroki wordlessly helps Izuku into his top.

It’s only after his back is fully covered that Todoroki opens his mouth.

“Those were burn scars,” he says quietly. Todoroki may not be a professional like Recovery Girl, but it makes sense that he’d recognize that, at least. “And you said your father had a fire quirk. Did... did he...”

Izuku turns his head to look at the other boy out of the corner of his eye. He can see the horror, compassion, sadness, and anger on Izuku’s behalf raging like a storm in Todoroki’s mismatched eyes. And at that moment, Izuku reaffirms that he’ll hide his scars from as many people as possible for as long as possible.

If this is how Todoroki—who’s never even really talked to him before

today—looks like after seeing his scars, he doesn't even want to imagine how his mentor or his *mother* might react.

"No," he says, trying for a reassuring smile but not sure it came out quite right. "This, at least, was by my own quirk. This wasn't by my father."

Todoroki's eyes bore into him. He must have picked something up in the way Izuku worded it because somehow he looks more pained than before. His eyes drop to Izuku's bare arms and the numerous scars on them.

"But the others *were."*

Izuku doesn't have an answer for that.

*

Toshinori waits quietly in the corner while Recovery Girl fusses over young Midoriya and Todoroki.

Midoriya had managed to land a *hard* kick on Todoroki, and the swelling and the ugly deep bruise that's forming on his side is prominent through his burnt P.E. uniform. There are also other bruises and cuts from the force of Midoriya's smashes and the shards of ice.

But despite Todoroki not having been able to land a single blow on Midoriya, it's out of the question that out of the two of them, Midoriya is the one who's far, far worse.

"Comminuted fracture in the right hand... I'm not going to be able to put this back together cleanly the way it was. For now, the fragments need to be extracted. Healing comes after that," the elderly nurse says with a heavy frown.

Toshinori notices that while young Midoriya himself looks almost serene at her diagnosis—and he isn't even on painkillers yet, god, this child will be the death of him—Todoroki's face turns as white as the sheets he's sitting on.

Toshinori himself feels pretty much the same.

He only now fully understands just how sparingly and just how *wisely*

Midoriya had been using One For All until today.

Before anyone can say anything more, the door bursts open.

“Midoriya!”

“Deku!”

“MIDORIYA!!”

Toshinori jumps and hacks up blood in surprise, making Midoriya shoot him a worried look before facing the newcomers. He blinks when he sees them.

“Guys?” It looks like at least a third of class 1-A is here, trying to squeeze in through the narrow doorway. “What are you doing here? What about the next match?”

“Well, you and Todoroki absolutely shattered the arena, so there’s a break as Cementos is doing the repairs.” Iida answers while adjusting his glasses, somehow having managed to get through the crowded doorway. Shoji isn’t even trying and just pokes a tentacle with an eye on the end over everyone’s heads.

Uraraka also manages to weasel in and starts approaching.

“We were worried, so we just had to come...”

And while that’s touching, Midoriya seems to pale the closer they approach. Toshinori catches him trying to shuffle his bandaged arms behind his back as subtly as possible, and understands.

He must not want his friends to see and worry about the scars on his arms that are still visible through the gaps in the bandages.

The scars that Todoroki, Recovery Girl, and Toshinori himself have already seen and have had burned into their memories.

Perhaps Recovery Girl clues into the same understanding, or she just genuinely wants the crowd out of her temporary office, because she begins herding the other students out before anyone can step close enough to get a clear view of young Midoriya’s arms.

“All right, pipe down and shoo now! It’s nice that you’re worried, but he’s preparing for surgery and needs quiet!”

Her words have the opposite effect.

“Surgery?!”

“Quiet, I said!” the nurse admonishes, then whirls around to Todoroki. “You too, out. Just remember to keep that ice pack on your side for another few minutes and you’ll be fine.”

Todoroki hesitates, his eyes darting to Midoriya. But he’s shooed out before either can say anything to each other.

It’s only when the room is finally empty except for Midoriya, Recovery Girl, and Toshinori himself that he dares leave the secluded corner he’d been in and shuffle closer to his prodigy.

Young Midoriya gives him a small smile before he turns to the nurse.

“How long will the surgery last?” he asks. “Iida said the arena is being reconstructed, and there are still three more matches until the semifinals, so there’s probably a decent amount of time before my next match…”

Recovery Girl draws back in surprise.

“You can’t possibly be intending to continue?”

Midoriya blinks.

“Of course I am.”

The nurse frowns heavily.

“Didn’t you hear what I just said? You have to go through surgery. The stress of that alone will tire you out, not to mention the exhaustion my healing quirk will add! And with the painkillers numbing your senses, you can’t possibly participate!”

“Then don’t use your quirk,” Midoriya counters, still unerringly polite and respectful but as calm and unrelenting as a brick wall. “And don’t give me the painkillers. You said the healing has to come later anyway; a few hours probably won’t make too much difference once the surgery is done. And I can handle pain.”

His nonchalant words pains *Toshinori.*

Recovery Girl seems to feel the same. She presses her lips into a thin line.

“You have enough of these as it is,” she says, pointing meaningfully at

the numerous scars peeking out from between the bandages on Midoriya's arms. "I can't heal you only for you to go right back out and hurt yourself again."

It's not exactly a threat, but it's close enough. But Toshinori wouldn't have chosen Midoriya as his successor if the boy was the type of person who backs down at a threat to his own person. (More and more often, Toshinori is coming to curse that fact rather than be glad of it.)

The corner of young Midoriya's mouth is set in a determined line.

"I lost my focus during the first two fights. I did end up winning, but I'd been more concerned about the person in front of me than the big picture. So if I want to really make an impact and announce myself, I need to keep going."

The elderly nurse throws her hands up.

"I thought you were being smart, not throwing One For All around willy-nilly. But now you've injured yourself to the point that you'll be crippled for life, and you still expect me to let you go out and fight again? Toshinori, *say* something. Maybe he'll listen to *you."*

Toshinori swallows as Midoriya turns his big, green eyes on him.

He knows what Recovery Girl means. He knows and *more.* Despite him being so damn proud of what his boy has accomplished—not just winning, but even saving his very opponents along the way—even though he knows it makes him a massive hypocrite, he doesn't want to see his boy being hurt anymore.

But as much as he wishes he didn't, he also understands *perfectly* what young Midoriya is saying. After all, it had been Toshinori himself who had told the boy to announce that 'I am here' to the world at the Sports Festival. It had been Toshinori himself who had told the boy that heroes need to know to push aside their own pain and fear for the good of the masses.

Things were so simple when it was his own wellbeing he'd had to put on the line. But when it's *his boy,* Toshinori is torn.

He finally feels like he understands what he put Sir Nighteye through.

"My boy..." Toshinori begins indecisively, but he can't find any other words. He works his jaw a few times.

In the end, he only ends up putting a hand on young Midoriya's shoulder.

Even Toshinori himself doesn't know if his own hand is meant to be encouraging or restricting.

Young Midoriya seems to read something in his gaze and smiles softly.

"It'll be okay, All Might," he says, (and Toshinori feels so incredibly *lost* for a moment when his boy says words that usually a mentor should say to his student, *not the other way around)* before turning back to Recovery Girl.

"My next fight will be with whoever wins between Tokoyami and Shiozaki. I promise that I can win that fight without being wounded anymore. So Recovery Girl, please. Let me go."

He looks the nurse dead in the eye.

"They're waiting."

And as much as he wishes he doesn't, Toshinori *understands.*

Recovery Girl seems to know she's fighting a losing battle and puts up her last defence with a resigned sigh.

"Who's waiting?"

Toshinori closes his eyes. He can hear his own voice egging on and burdening his boy.

Announce that 'I am here' to the world!

"The world."

*

"WEEEEELCOME to the semifinals!" Present Mic screeches into his microphone. "This is our top four, folks, and all of them are from class 1-A! Rejoice, mass media! Ain't this exactly the type of scenario you eat up? Anyways, first up is Midoriya Izuku... Should you even be competing?!"

...Well. Izuku can't really blame Present Mic. His right arm is in a cast and hanging from a sling, his left arm is fully covered in bandages, and there are swathes of gauze on his face and neck too, after all. With all the bandages and gauze covering every inch of skin on his upper body that's not covered by his tank top, he's only a little better off than Aizawa's mummified state.

Nevertheless, he stands tall as he faces off Tokoyami, a new P.E. jumper hanging off his shoulders with the sleeves fluttering lightly in the breeze.

"Midoriya," Tokoyami calls solemnly. "Are you certain you want to go through with this? There is no shame in choosing your battles, and I rate you too highly to risk going easy on you."

That's... actually really nice of him. Both the recommendation and the warning. Izuku hasn't had much interaction with Tokoyami, not with the other boy tending to keep quietly to himself and Izuku's tendency to give people space unless they look like they need help, but he can feel the high regard Tokoyami holds him in just by his words. It's almost enough to make Izuku blush, but he fights it down.

Unlike Todoroki or even Shinsou, Tokoyami doesn't need his help. And in that case, Izuku can't afford to be distracted anymore.

"Thank you for your concern, Tokoyami. But," Izuku bares his teeth in a grin. "I didn't come here to lose."

"START!!!"

As soon as Present Mic gives the signal, Tokoyami wastes no time.

"Dark Shadow!"

"Aiyo!"

Dark Shadow bursts out, streaking towards Izuku like a bolt of black lightning. Judging from the speed and angle, the two are probably trying to have Dark Shadow envelop Izuku and push him out of bounds as quickly as possible.

But Izuku doesn't panic. There had been a reason he'd been able to confidantly promise Recovery Girl that he wouldn't get hurt during the semifinals, after all. Against Shiozaki's vines or Tokoyami's Dark Shadow, Izuku has the upper hand.

He lifts his bandaged left arm with the palm facing the approaching darkness of Dark Shadow.

It's our power, Todoroki's voice assures softly in his head.

And with that soothing whisper in the back of his mind, Izuku *pushes.*

A burst of flame shoots forward. Dark Shadow lets out a shrill squawk and flees back to Tokoyami in the blink of an eye, cowering with its head held low as Izuku's flames form a tight circle around them.

Tokoyami tries to jump back and out of the ring of flames before it grows too tall, but Izuku twitches a finger and *pulls* him back into the centre of the circle before closing off the fiery fence. The other boy looks around warily.

Izuku grins.

"Sorry, Dark Shadow," he apologizes, and the shadowy beast looks at him with teary eyes. "You really don't like light, do you?"

Dark Shadow trills sadly. Tokoyami sighs. "How did you figure it out so quickly?"

Izuku shrugs one shoulder. He may not have worked with Tokoyami and seen his quirk up close, but he's seen enough. Quirk analysis is his specialty, after all.

"When you teamed up with Kacchan for the cavalry battle, you put Dark Shadow on fetch duty. Considering Kacchan's temper, he would have blasted off explosions just to let out his frustration, but he didn't. At least not while Dark Shadow was around. It doesn't make sense for Kacchan to suddenly become considerate, so the only other explanation is that it was a tactical restraint. Plus, its name is Dark *Shadow."*

Dark Shadow reflexively puffs out its chest at its name, though it instantly cowers back when a lick of flame flickers. Tokoyami smiles wryly, and though he seems resigned he also looks like he's taking it well.

"As expected of you, Midoriya." Izuku blinks. Didn't Shoji say something along the same lines as well? How did it come to be that his classmates have such high esteem of him? He doesn't know if he feels more happy or nervous at the acknowledgement. "After seeing you use fire in your last fight, I'd hoped to take you out before you

clued in, but I see you were already a step ahead of me."

Tokoyami takes one last look at the wall of flames surrounding him before nodding and looking towards Midnight.

"I concede defeat."

"Alright! Winner, Midoriya!"

Izuku extinguishes his fire and exchanges smiles with Tokoyami. Dark Shadow gives him a thumbs up when the flames vanish before it itself vanishes into Tokoyami.

Izuku's about to approach the other boy and ask more about his quirk (he's a hardcore fan of quirks in general, after all, and this is as good an opportunity as ever) as they make their way back to the stands, but instead, he's ushered away and straight to the waiting room since there's only one more battle before he's up again.

It's disconcerting sitting alone in the waiting room with only Present Mic's voice ringing in the speakers. He's kept his promise with Recovery Girl about not getting hurt—even his fire hasn't burnt him this time, for some reason—so he doesn't even have the option of having the company of the nurse either.

Thankfully, the match doesn't drag on too long. Judging by Present Mic's commentary, it looks like Iida had been giving Bakugo a hard time by jetting around with his superior speed. But with a combination of good timing, genius battle sense, luck, and sheer relentless stubbornness, Bakugo managed to just barely blast himself out of Iida's grasp and turn the tables on the other boy.

Finally, Izuku is called to leave the waiting room and enter the arena. As he steps onto the platform and stands in front of Bakugo, he notices that the other boy isn't roaring to fight. He's not gloating about his victory, or trying to get a rise out of Izuku, or even *looking* at him.

Come to think of it, Bakugo has been... strangely quiet. He hadn't come storming to Izuku after seeing him use fire not just once, but twice against someone else. And he'd been looking at Izuku weirdly ever since lunchtime ended, too.

Izuku takes his place in front of Bakugo. In the background he distantly hears Present Mic playing up the crowds for the final battle, but his focus is on his—childhood friend? Izuku still isn't sure how to define Bakugo—who has his head bowed with his bangs shadowing

his eyes.

“Oi, Deku.”

His voice is low enough that not even Midnight should be able to hear it over the noise of the crowd. And when Bakugo continues speaking, Izuku is fiercely glad for that fact.

“Before, I overheard you talking with Half and Half about your fathers and fire.”

Izuku *freezes.*

Bakugo continues in that low voice, still with his eyes lowered and his brow slightly furrowed as if conflicted about something.

“And it just, everything *clicked.* Why you never talked about your dad. Why you and your mom used to be afraid of fire and my quirk. Why you don’t use *your* quirk. And I...” He looks down at his own two hands.

“So I thought about it, and I was just going to... let it go,” he says quietly. “I was set on making you use all of your fucking quirk, for *ten fucking years,* but... but if that was the reason you wouldn't use it, then I was going to let it go.”

Izuku listens with his heart in his throat. He doesn’t even hear the crowd or the teachers anymore. It’s almost like a repeat of the trial of battle, where Bakugo had first sprung a view shattering revelation on Izuku with no warning.

He really hopes this doesn’t become a pattern. He doesn’t know if his heart can take it anymore.

“But then Half and Half comes along, and you use that fire that you fucking *hate* for him. And I get it, with Half and Half. You’re *you,* so of course you’d be a fucking hypocrite and try to help him with his daddy issues or whatever. But then you used your fire on Birdface too. And I thought maybe that means you’re okay with using your fire. But then again, what the fuck do I know? I didn’t even know about whatever happened with your dad even after ten fucking years. So I thought about it, and kept thinking, but I still don’t fucking know.”

His voice is low and even, but Izuku swallows thickly because he *knows* how much it must cost Bakugo to admit something like this.

Bakugo finally looks up. His red eyes pierce Izuku with frustration, confusion, hesitation, loss, deprivation, and *hope.*

“So Deku. You tell me. What am I supposed to do?”

His question leaves Izuku breathless.

That steady red gaze is unwavering and relentless as it always was, yet with that same gaze, for the first time Bakugo is asking *Izuku,* giving *him* the reins. Like Bakugo said before, he’d wanted to make Izuku use his entire quirk to beat him at his best. But after hearing that Izuku is traumatized by his quirk, Bakugo said he was going to let it be.

Being the best is Bakugo's lifelong dream. Beating Izuku at his best is, in his eyes, a step he must take to fulfill that. But he’s prepared to let go of the goal he’s been chasing after for a *decade* in consideration for Izuku’s charred and bruised past. That act in itself is already considerate. But coming from *Bakugo,* it's...

Being a bad person is not the same thing as being a villain.

And no matter what kind of person he used to be, no matter what anyone else says, this right here proves to Izuku that Bakugo Katsuki has the makings of a *great* hero.

It's at this moment that, for the first time, Izuku is able to firmly define Bakugo as his friend.

There’s only one answer Izuku can give him.

Brilliant fire bursts up around Izuku, whipping around his body like the eye of a tornado. Izuku bares his teeth in a grin, relishing in the surprised and slightly awestruck expression on Bakugo’s face.

“Thank you, Kacchan. And... sorry for keeping you waiting. But now, *I am here.”*

Bakugo pulls his lips back in an answering savage grin.

“Fucking *finally.”*

*

“Howitzer Impact!” Bakugo shouts as he blasts himself through the wall of flames Izuku had created.

Izuku hastily *pulls* himself out of the way as Bakugo comes spinning at him. The jumper that had been hanging off his shoulders is blown away, and the concrete floor where he’d just been is shattered by the impact. Even in this urgent moment, Izuku’s mind is in overdrive as it analyzes and marvels at the technique. Bakugo instantly turns around and snarls as he chases Izuku.

The inability to use both his arms fully costs Izuku, and though he does his best to dodge Bakugo’s blows and block the ones he can't with his left arm, he still ends up taking quite a few hits including an elbow straight to his face.

Izuku coughs, blood spurting from his nose and dripping into his mouth.

“Absolutely SAVAGE!! Even though he’s going up against a severly injured opponent, there’s NO MERCY from Bakugo!!” Present Mic roars, and some of the crowd clamours and cheers while some actually boo.

But they don’t know Bakugo like Izuku does.

They don’t know that this is Bakugo saying ‘even with half your limbs messed up, I still see you as a serious threat.’

They don’t know that this is the highest praise Bakugo can give.

But Izuku *does* know.

So Izuku spits out the blood pooled in his mouth and *grins* through the blood on his teeth. He pulls his right arm out of its sling and readies himself. He’d only promised Recovery Girl that he wouldn’t get hurt in the *semifinals,* after all, and he’d said nothing about the finals. (He knows it’s only technical and he’ll get chewed out later, but at this moment he can’t afford to focus on that.)

It’s time to strike back.

Izuku points his left hand at Bakugo. He almost hesitates reflexively before aiming his fire at Bakugo because unlike making a wall of fire, it's the first time he's actually aimed it at a person since the second match. But then Todoroki’s soft voice echoes in his mind— *it’s our power, not our fathers’* —and he's able to smoothly push out his fire.

It doesn't even burn him.

Izuku shoots out a blast of fire, trusting Bakugo's reflexes will keep him from being burned. True to his expectations, Bakugo swerves around the jet of flame and keeps running towards Izuku, using explosions from his hands to speed up.

"Blast Rush Turbo!" he shouts as a burst of explosion propels him towards Izuku.

But right before he comes into range, Izuku grins and *pulls* him straight into the literal line of fire.

Bakugo curses and brings his hands up in front of himself, using his explosions to negate the flame. But Izuku has used his moment of distraction to close the distance on his own terms.

Since one of his arms is in a cast and the other is covered in bandages, Izuku can't fight like he used to. The beat down he'd received earlier has more than proved that. He needs to take a different approach.

So instead of throwing a punch, Izuku sweeps out a leg in a wide kick. Bakugo hisses as he just barely manages to block with a forearm, and before he can angle his palms and blast him Izuku streaks past and behind him again, aiming a roundhouse kick at his head. Bakugo leans back to dodge and simultaneously aims a blast at Izuku, and this time Izuku is the one forced to counter it by pushing out his own fire.

But instead of just negating it, Izuku decides to back off for a bit to get some breathing room. They're too close to the edge of the arena for comfort, and even though Bakugo's the one with his back to the edge, it's probably safer to get back to the middle if he wants to avoid having the tables turned on him like Iida and get pushed out of bounds.

And suddenly, a stroke of brilliance (or idiocy, as he'll later think back) strikes.

He'd already been thinking that he needs to find a way to cushion and redirect his flight when he's pulling himself. Now that his mother isn't (shouldn't be) (please let her not be) watching, why not test it now?

First he spreads his arms out on opposite each other, his left arm faced forwards with the right arm aimed behind himself. He sends a blast of wide flame at Bakugo with his left hand, enough to negate the explosions and keep him from approaching. At the same time, he

sends a small push out of his right palm too, enough to keep himself braced and prevented from flying back from the force of his own attack.

Bakugo grits his teeth and rapidly fires off explosions from his palms, negating Izuku's flames and stubbornly inching closer.

But Izuku isn't done yet.

Suddenly Izuku swings his right arm around next to his left. His right arm aches inside the cast, but Izuku ignores the pain as he angles his hands so that both his arms are straight and braced with the palms facing forwards towards Bakugo.

Then he *grins.*

"Blast Rush Turbo!" he yells as he *pulls* himself backwards while simultaneously *pushing* fire out of his palms, using the blast of flames to adjust his path and give himself an extra speed boost.

A moment of silence fills the arena.

And then—

"—WHAT THE ACTUAL *FUCK?!!!!"* Bakugo screams as he gapes at Izuku shamelessly ripping off his own move right in front of him. But then his expression turns murderous as he uses both palms to blast himself towards Izuku. "BLAST RUSH TURBO!!"

This time, Izuku swings around his hands so that his palms are aimed behind himself and pushes out flames, using the boosters to kill his momentum so that he can meet Bakugo in the middle of the arena.

Bakugo descends on him in a flurry of blows like a vengeful demon from hell.

"I can't even— what the fuck— how did you even— you just ripped off my— cheat— *copyright* —"

Izuku laughs unapologetically as he ducks around Bakugo's enraged blows.

"Sorry, Kacchan," he says in a parody of the trial of battle. "But if you didn't want me to take advantage of it, you shouldn't have shown it to me in the first place."

Bakugo looks like he's torn between being furious, impressed,

indignant, and satisfied that Izuku really is pulling all the stops to come at him with everything he has.

In the end, he ends up just settling on all of it and snarls a shit-eating grin while earnestly trying to beat the crap out of Izuku.

“Ohhh, you fucking arrogant *bastard.* I’m going to bury you *so deep* that you eat the *dirt* under all this cement.”

Which may as well be the Bakugo equivalent for declaring competitive friendship from the rooftops.

It’s progress.

Izuku bares his teeth in a savage answering grin, and instead of just avoiding Bakugo’s blows he starts striking back.

While Izuku had looked up to All Might’s ideology, in terms of fighting style it was Eraserhead he had studied more. All Might’s fighting style is more or less summed up to SMASH, and while that’s *epicly* cool (Izuku will fight anyone who says otherwise) Izuku knew that he himself wouldn’t be able to pull that off. (Or, well, at least that was true until he actually received All Might’s SMASHy quirk. Actually, scratch that, even now he still can't do it.) So while he couldn’t actually train physically without supervision, Izuku had studied, analyzed, picked apart, and ingrained Eraserhead’s fighting style into his memory with almost religious determination.

And just like he used the capture tape on Bakugo before, now he uses that knowledge to fight.

Izuku weaves around Bakugo, flitting in and out like he’s seen Eraserhead do in the few video clips he’d dug up and replayed until he’d memorized every frame. He’s learned from before; he can’t match Bakugo with both his arms wounded, so he’s going to have to use guerilla tactics and favour his legs.

He tries kicking Bakugo’s side, sweeping his legs out from under him, and kneeing him in the stomach. He uses small doses of One For All, and the power and speed it gives him just about makes up for his inexperience. And living up to the appraisal of being a battle genius, Bakugo swiftly adapts to Izuku’s new kick-based fighting style and focuses on Izuku's legs and starts ignoring his flailing arms.

But that was exactly what Izuku had been aiming for.

While the other boy is distracted by a feint kick Izuku makes, instead of lashing out Izuku plants that foot on the ground, uses it as an axis to spin around, and brings his right arm around in a wide arc to the back of Bakugo's head.

The image of Aizawa plopping his cast of Izuku's head flashes in his mind.

Izuku's cast hits the back of Bakugo's head with a resounding SMACK.

"Fuck—" Bakugo sputters as his head is knocked forwards and he stumbles off balance, his head ringing.

Izuku doesn't lose his opportunity.

If this had been a straight out fight in hand to hand combat, Izuku wouldn't have stood a chance against a battle genius powerhouse like Bakugo. Not with his current physical state, and perhaps not even if he'd been fully healthy either. But just like the trial of battle, this isn't an assessment of skills in combat. It's a competition that allows quirks, with specific rules that Izuku can exploit.

He grabs the sling hanging around his neck with his teeth, then uses his left hand charged with the smallest dose of One For All he can manage to swiftly rip it into one long strip. And with one end of the makeshift rope in his teeth, he bodyslams Bakugo to the ground and quickly ties Bakugo's hands behind his back using his left hand and his teeth.

"Are you fucking serious?! This AGAIN?!" Bakugo shouts as he squirms on the ground, face down, legs kicking angrily. Before he can regain his feet, Izuku quickly plops down on his back and sits on him to keep him down. Bakugo tries to buck him off, but Izuku pins down his legs with his own One For All charged legs and stays on top.

"At least you're not gagged this time," Izuku says a little remorsefully in consolation. If only he'd had more cloth... or the mobility of his right hand... he thinks wistfully.

The look Bakugo gives him is positively scandalized.

"WOOOOOO!! That's Eraserhead's signature move right there! What the hell are you teaching your kids?!" Present Mic screeches delightedly, almost toppling over in his excitement.

"I didn't do anything," Aizawa replies, though Izuku thinks he can

detect a tinge of... *something* else in his usually bland longsuffering voice. Is that... amusement? “That one *came* like that.”

Izuku blushes.

“Wait a sec, is he even allowed to use his sling like that? Not to mention his cast?!” Present Mic points out.

“Hmmm...” Midnight narrows her eyes, then winks as she gives a cheery thumbs up. “I like your youthful spirit! It’s fine since it’s medical equipment!”

“The judge says it’s fine!” Present Mic echoes jovially.

“Bakugo! Do you concede defeat?” Midnight asks.

“Hell no!” the blonde snarls, still face down and squirming.

Midnight rolls her eyes. This time she changes the question.

“Can you move?”

“...”

Bakugo has no answer to that, just growling lowly like some caged animal.

Izuku is seriously tempted to pet his spiky hair, just to see how he’d react.

(He’ll probably either try to bite Izuku’s hand off or be too scandalized to even react.)

“Alright! Bakugo can’t move. Winner: Midoriya Izuku!”

*

Izuku stands on the highest podium, Bakugo and Tokoyami on either side. Tokoyami catches his eye and quirks a small smile at him, Dark Shadow popping out to give him a wave. Izuku grins back, glad that both of them seem to have no hard feelings. Rather the contrary, if Izuku is judging right.

This time he turns his head to the other side to meet Bakugo's smouldering eyes.

He huffs, though Izuku is familiar enough with Bakugo to be able to see that there's a surprising lack of actual hostility or even bitterness in his red eyes.

"Enjoy the view while you can, nerd, 'cause I'm gonna drag you down and stomp you into the ground next time."

Which may as well be the Bakugo equivalent to "Hey, good job, let's hang out again later!"

Izuku grins brightly.

"Thanks, Kacchan!"

He can feel Tokoyami giving them a weird look at their—admittedly strange—exchange, but Bakugo just huffs lightly and turns his head.

Their relationship will probably always be at least a bit dysfunctional, but like he said, they're making progress.

All Might soon makes a dynamic entrance to award the medals. He speaks softly with Tokoyami and Bakugo before hanging the medals around their necks, and soon, it's Izuku's turn.

Izuku swallows as his hero stands before him. Because of the podium, it's the first time he's looking down at All Might instead of up.

Just before going out to fight Shinsou, Izuku had been at his lowest in the recent years. But the words All Might had whispered in his ears while crushing him against his thin chest comes back to him.

*"And I said this before too, but remember it as well. Whatever happens out there, I am **so proud** of you."*

Izuku remembers.

Those words had helped drag Izuku out of the pit he had fallen into. They had made such an impact on him that he had even dared reach out and repeat the exact same words to Uraraka. Izuku covets those words like a dragon hoards gold, like a beggar hungers for food.

He swallows.

"All, All Might." And god, he had been able to stare down powerful

people like Tokoyami and Bakugo, had even butted heads against *Recovery Girl,* but it's only in this moment that his voice trembles. "Did I..."

Did I make you proud?

Izuku can't even dare to ask the question.

But it looks like All Might doesn't even need to hear it to understand.

The hero gently crushes Izuku against his chest again, though this time he's buffed and muscular instead of thin and bony. But the embrace is still the same—tight enough to be reassuring but infinitely gentle to the point of almost being a cradle.

"Always," All Might breathes in Izuku's ear, low enough that no one else can hear. "I am and will always be *so proud* of you, my boy."

Izuku's breath hitches.

He no longer flinches at the words 'my boy.'

Instead, he stands tall as All Might draws back to slip the gold medal over his head. And when the man flashes him a tender smile, he smiles right back.

*

After the award ceremonies, class 1-A surges forwards toward the medalists. Uraraka joins the laughing and exclamations as everyone congratulates the medalists. It's a shame that Iida, who had also placed third, had to leave for some family business.

When she finally elbows her way to Midoriya, she finds his hair so ruffled up that curly strands fall out of his bun and the jumper on his back dishevelled from too many enthusiastic pat on the backs. But his face is flushed and his eyes are shining from laughter and happiness, and the sight brings a smile to Uraraka's face.

She notices Todoroki hovering at Midoriya's right side—near his cast, as if shielding Midoriya from being jostled and subtly clinging to him at the same time—with a peculiar expression. The boy's face seems to be blank as it usually is, but somehow it looks... softer? Like the

jagged edges have been chipped away and the ice has been thawed.

Honestly, Uraraka had expected Todoroki to have already left. He's usually not one for crowds or mingling, and it looked like he and Midoriya were out to kill each other during their match. There was too much steam to see what happened directly after the collision, but still, it was intense.

But then again, this is Midoriya they're talking about. He's like a sun; people can't help but gravitate towards him.

And they seemed to have something in common with their fire quirks. Uraraka had no idea that Midoriya even *had* a fire quirk, and she's not sure how to feel about having found out only now. But in the end, she decides not to pry.

Instead, she smiles brightly and makes light of it.

"Congratulation, Deku! I knew you'd make it! Though you could have given us a warning before you burst into fire. I thought I was going to have a heart attack!"

Midoriya flushes as he returns her smile ruefully.

"Sorry, Uraraka. I should have worked up the courage to tell you all before, but..."

Uraraka waves away his apology before he can even finish.

"No, no, don't worry about it. I already knew you were an angel, I was just surprised you have actual wings." Uraraka winks, grinning unapologetically.

But Midoriya blinks.

"...I have what?"

This time, it's Uraraka who blinks. She stares at Midoriya's genuinely confused face in disbelief. A few of their classmates who'd been in hearing range join her and gape at Midoriya.

This guy. Is *unbelievable.*

"Just type your name on the internet," she finally says. "I'm sure you're a meme by now."

She waits for it.

"...I'm a *what?"*

Uraraka and the others *laugh* at Midoriya's absolutely *horrified* expression.

*

Aizawa finds Midoriya on his way to Recovery Girl's temporary office. The kid is just coming out, looking tired from having his energy sapped from the nurse's healing quirk. Though, even without that, Aizawa wouldn't blame Midoriya for being exhausted. The kid has had a long day, as the bandages all over him testify. Really, he looks like a slightly better off version of Aizawa himself.

Speaking of similarities, Aizawa finally gets what All Might had meant about Midoriya "pulling an Eraserhead." That technique and deftness when he tied up Bakugo with his own sling was quite... something.

Midoriya turns from the door and finally notices Aizawa quietly watching him. He jumps a little.

"A— Aizawa sensei!"

Aizawa regards his problem child silently. He's slowly making his way through the mountain of files of every case he'd been on in the past decade. He's employed and an underground hero, but he still does hero work whenever he can so there have been quite a few cases. And ten years is a *long* time, which means a *lot* of files.

He hasn't found anything that looks like it might be Midoriya yet. At first he looked into anything related to a child, and then anything related to fire quirks. Considering how absolutely traumatized Midoriya seemed to be about his fire quirk, Aizawa had wondered if maybe the kid had set off a fire when he was young and Aizawa had rescued him from his own fire or something. But whatever the truth is, he's going to have to work on the kid's trauma.

And the pure *adoration* in Midoriya's green, green eyes as he stares up at Aizawa is *not* helping him think.

In the end, Aizawa ends up deadpanning and joking ironically.

“Midoriya. You didn’t tell me you were a fiery angel.”

The kid turns pink.

“I’m sorry! I mean, I’m not! I mean, no I’m not an angel, not that I’m not sorry! ...Should I even be sorry?”

Man, this kid.

Aizawa hides his grin under his bandages.

Something is on the tip of his tongue, but he refrains from saying it. He’s a teacher; he can’t have favourites, after all.

...But then again, it’s not favouritism if it’s saying the truth, is it?

In the end, Aizawa gives in to the urge.

He plops his cast on Midoriya’s head again. (And boy, is this becoming too familiar. He has an image and a reputation to maintain, damn it, but his problem child is being just that; problematic.)

“Nah. You did good, Midoriya.”

The kid *beams.*

*

But like all good things, this day too must come to an end.

The sun is setting on his back as Izuku stands in front of the front door of his apartment, his left hand resting on the doorknob but not being able to open it. He knows that he owes his mother an explanation. He knows he's going to have to confront both their pasts, fears, and traumas. He knows... he *wants* to tell her about his dream again.

But he is so, so afraid he might hurt her. Again.

Izuku takes a nervous deep breath.

*I will always be **so proud** of you,* All Might had promised.

You did good, Aizawa had assured him.

It's our power, Todoroki had revealed.

He takes those words and tries to drown out the faint screaming and laughter that is always in the back of his mind. Hisashi may be his living nightmare, but those words are no dream. He draws strength and courage from those words.

Izuku straightens his shoulders, and turns the handle.

"I'm home, Mom."

*

Late in the night, Inko slips from her bed and tiptoes to the living room. She puts the tv on mute—both she and her son sleep far too lightly for their own good—and turns on the recording of the Sports Festival. She had turned off the tv when Izuku had called, but she had still recorded every second.

Izuku had come home that day, and they had talked about his quirk for the first time since he'd turned four.

Inko had supported him. Of course she did. How could she not, after everything she put him through? How could she not, after how she'd first reacted to his quirk? Inko herself is still afraid of fire, but she will not let that keep Izuku back anymore. After all, her son has had to be strong for both of them all those years ago. This is the least Inko can do for him.

But saying she supports him is different from actually accepting the fact that *he is using fire.*

So here she is, in the dead of the night, fast forwarding the muted recording until she gets to the second round of the tournament.

Inko watches the brutal match with clenched fists. She has no idea what the two boys are saying, but the expression on Izuku's face is familiar.

It's the face he'd worn whenever he stood to protect Inko.

And finally, the moment comes when her son bursts into flames.

A halo of fire burns at Izuku's back. And then it splits in two to unfurl and become wings.

Inko pauses the video, rewinds, and watches it again. And again. And again.

Eventually, her trembling hands lose their grip on the remote control and it clatters softly to the ground. The recording is paused, and on the screen Izuku is grinning freely in a way Inko has never seen with the halo of fire at his back just about to unfurl into wings.

Inko remembers the first and only time she had seen Izuku's fire.

He had been trying to protect her, she remembers. Fire had burst out of him, just like she's seeing now. And it had formed a halo.

It probably would have turned into wings if she hadn't *screamed* at him.

“Oh Izuku,” Inko whispers a muffled sob as she curls up into herself. “Oh Izuku, I am *so sorry.”*

And Izuku leans against the far wall of the living room, out of sight from his mother. He listens to his mother's strangled sobs and closes his eyes.

No, Mom. Don't be sorry. What I wanted you to say was...

Chapter End Notes

So, following the rasengan, Izuku now also has an X-burner. ¯_(ツ)_/¯

I love how the Izuku Headbang is like, our thing now. I do it in the AN. You do it in the comments. Four-year-old Izuku does it in canon.
I officially christen this the Izuku Headbang Gang. Let’s do it all together.
IZUKU HEADBANG

Anyways, thank you so much for all your comments! They

seriously blew me away. The only reason it took me so long to pump out the next chapter after an energy boost like that was because I had to fly to the opposite side of the globe to attend to real life things (ugh) and.. because of... God of War... and Detroit Become Human... *hangs head*
Also, regarding updates, as I mentioned before I am now on the other side of the planet doing real life things so updates will not be as frequent as before. (Two chapters a week?? I must have been mad.) Though rest assured that I'll be back sooner or later, and I'll try to come with longer chapters instead!!
But seriously, all your lovely, lovely comments are the fuel for this fic. Thank you guys so much.

Throughout the scene where Todoroki went all Elsa and made Izuku ice clothes I was like:
DO YOU WANNA BUILD A SNOWMAN
LET IT GO
LOVE IS AN OPEN DOOOOOOOOR

+ Bonus - Personal favourite line:
Todo: Have you seen my face?
Izu: But your face is still pretty. *sincere* *clueless*
Todo:

The Naming of a Star

Chapter Notes

Okay, so I had no idea where to cut this chapter off but didn't want to leave you guys on a cliffhanger, thus it kept getting longer... and longer... and longer... until I ended up with something like 16k words. ...Well, hope this monster of a chapter makes up for your wait!!

On another note, FAN ART!!!!!! (cries with joy)

AnimeLover917 made the Izuku Headbang
https://animelover917.deviantart.com/art/IZUKU-HEADBANG-RH4BJFIVGFIUHBR-749488886

FloatingOnAFeeling drew Izuku with wings/halo
https://floatingonafeeling.deviantart.com/art/Burn-Your-Wings-749529354?ga_submit_new=10%3A1528867503

flat-san drew Izuku both with/without his fire lighting
http://flat-san.tumblr.com/post/175634123375/i-read-an-interesting-bnha-fic-the-other-day

Bless, bless you all for not only giving us these wonderful fan arts, but also GIVING ME THE ADDRESS. Now let's just hope I can link them properly.. (fingers crossed)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They're given the two days following the Sports Festival off from school, and Shouto decides to take this opportunity to go see his mother for the first time in years. Midoriya had changed his view—well actually, more like his *entire world,* to be honest—but it's not enough for Shouto to find peace alone. In a way, he's thankful that he didn't have any more matches after Midoriya. He isn't sure he would have been able to think clearly, much less use his left side. No, for Shouto to fully accept his fire, he needs to talk to his mother.

He knows that. He's made his decision. He's already dressed and packed to made the journey to the hospital she's in.

That's not what he's hesitating and stalling over.

The thing is, Shouto has his cell phone out. The screen shows the opened messaging app with Midoriya's number in the recipient, thanks to that incident after the USJ where everyone in class 1-A exchanged numbers.

He's been staring at the blinking cursor for the past ten minutes.

The screen had actually turned off in the middle because of his inactivity, startling him, and Shouto had had to hastily turn his phone back on. But he still hasn't been able to type anything, much less *send* anything to Midoriya. He *wants* to, that's for sure, but he has no idea what. Or how.

It's strange, this instant... Shouto doesn't even know what to call it. Closeness? Intimacy? Understanding? Kinship? Bond? Yearning? ...Dependency? Whatever it is, it binds him and draws him to Midoriya. He can't help but gravitate towards the other boy, wanting to be closer, wanting to know more.

Wanting to call him *Izuku.*

Except, when they had talked briefly after the awarding ceremony, Midoriya had called him *Todoroki.*

"...Todoroki?" Shouto had repeated slowly, everything that had been simmering on the tip of his tongue forgotten. *"Not Shouto?"*

Midoriya had given him an apologetic smile. *"Oh, um. I kinda blew propriety in the heat of the moment during the match, and that thing with Endeavor was... well. That wasn't polite of me. I'm sorry."*

And he had honestly, genuinely looked sorry. He had been careful and considerate, as if blaming himself for raging at Shouto earlier during their match and trying to make up for it by not overwhelming him again. As if he'd overstepped some boundary that he normally wouldn't have, as if he didn't want to pressure him, as if he were backing away to give space.

As if he hadn't already gone and shattered Shouto's world and rebuilt it with his bare hands.

Shouto had wanted to tell him that it was alright. That it was refreshing to not be called as Todoroki *(his father's name)* and that it had brought back the memory of how his mother would call him *Shouto* in her soft, warm voice. That the way Midoriya said his name overlapped with that treasured memory. That he appreciated it. That

he wanted it. That he wanted to call him *Izuku* too.

But he didn't know how to say that. He didn't know if he should. If he even could. Midoriya wasn't even on first name bases with Uraraka and Iida, his *friends,* after all, so what right did Shouto have?

Shouto didn't know, as he's never really done proper social interaction. And he really, *really* didn't want to mess this up.

So he had just nodded numbly at Midoriya's considerate (and yet unneeded and un*wanted*) courtesy.

But that doesn't mean he's able to go back to before he knew Midoriya just like that. They had had something, right after their match. But yesterday feels like ages ago, and now Shouto isn't sure anymore. Perhaps all Midoriya had wanted was to help Shouto break through his shackles (and maybe his own too) but Shouto finds himself clinging to any sliver of hope that the kinship he'd felt between them hadn't just been temporary. That it might last longer. That it could be more.

Hence, here he is now, staring blankly at the cursor of his messaging app that blinks back mockingly at him, determined to reach out but still without the foggiest clue on *how*.

But then—

Ping!

A message pops up in the previously empty chat log and Shouto jumps in surprise and panic. His hand spasms and he almost drops the phone. For a wild moment he thinks he might have accidentally sent something, but no, the message flashing on his screen clearly reads that it's from Midoriya.

It's from Midoriya.

Midoriya texted him.

Shouto manages to squeeze in a split second of relief, panic, wonder, and elation before his phone pings repeatedly and more messages appear one after the other in short succession. It's just enough to shake him out of his daze and actually read what Midoriya has sent him.

[OH MY GOD]

[WHAT]

[HOW]

[WHY]

[(link)]

The rapid succession of short messages does nothing to relieve Shouto's confusion. Perplexed, he taps on the link, only to find a news clip on Midoriya. Which in itself is nothing surprising, seeing as he hadn't simply just won the Sports Festival but absolutely took it by storm.

Shouto is distracted by the photo emblazoned at the top—Midoriya with his wings of flame spread wide behind him like an ethereal angel, his right arm outstretched with gusts of wind from his super strength blowing strands of dark curly hair out of his bun, grinning sharply as the light of his fire throws his face into sharp relief and casts his normally soft and kind features in deep shadows and brilliant highlights, and his green, green eyes burning with light—before he finally drags his eyes down to read the headlines.

He chokes.

[MIDORIYA IZUKU: SUPER STRENGTH AND FIRE... THE SECRET LOVE CHILD OF ALL MIGHT AND ENDEAVOR?]

And just. That's just. Just...

As Midoriya has already said: What. How. Why.

Oh my *god.*

After having seen Midoriya break down hysterically at the question of whether All Might is his father, how much issue he has with his own father, and how absolutely *vicious* he'd been to Endeavor, Shouto can practically see the utter *horror* that must be on Midoriya's face at the joking headlines.

And despite the uncertainty and doubt that had been gnawing at Shouto, all of that falls away and he inexplicably feels so *light* at the fact that Midoriya has chosen to reach out first and share this little

inside joke with him.

Midoriya may not call him *Shouto* anymore, and Shouto himself definitely can't call him *Izuku,* but... but maybe, someday, they will.

Shouto looks at the joking headlines again and a small huff leaves his mouth unbidden, surprising even Shouto himself.

It's the closest he's been to laughing in years.

*

So when Shouto stands at the front of the classroom two days later, he's no longer plagued with doubt and uncertainty. He doesn't quite smile, but he relishes in the feeling of Midoriya's green eyes on him as he announces his temporary hero name:

Shouto

*

Izuku looks down at the sizable stack of hero agencies that have drafted him. He's managed to gain the most nominations, with Bakugo a close second.

("Huh. I'd expected it to be more overwhelming. Midoriya won, well, *everything* after all," Kaminari had commented. "Perhaps the fact that his quirk is self-destructive brought down the numbers...?" Yaoyorozu had mused. "It's still in the *thousands.* I have *zero,"* Ashido had whined while flopping down on her desk, though she had also good-naturedly waved away Izuku's apologetic look with a smile.)

He's going to have to categorize them by type and within those categories create subsets according to the number of incidents resolved and experience, and he shouldn't forget their ranking even if he'll probably look more into their skillset relative to what Izuku needs the most help with and wow this is going to be so much research—

Izuku notices from his peripherals that quite a few of his classmates are looking on at him muttering away with indulgent smiles on their faces, and self-consciously clicks his mouth shut with a sheepish grin. Instead of running his mouth again he turns his eyes to the list in front of him and scans the first page to get a better idea of where to start— and promptly freezes at one of the names that stare back at him.

He looks down at the name for a long moment.

Finally, he jerks his eyes away from the page. Izuku turns his head around to look at Todoroki's seat which is roughly diagonally behind him. Perhaps that inexplicable link between them is still there because even though Izuku hasn't even opened his mouth, Todoroki somehow still looks up almost instantly to meet his eyes as if drawn by some force. The other boy must see something in Izuku's gaze because he gets up from his chair and comes over without a word.

"Did you need something?" Todoroki asks softly, settling into the empty seat behind Izuku's that was once Mineta's. Izuku turns around to straddle his chair and face Todoroki properly.

"Advice, I guess," Izuku starts hesitantly. "And to let you know. I feel like I should ask your— well, not exactly permission, but opinion? At the very least, I thought you might want to know about this."

And while the classroom is noisy enough with their classmates talking animatedly with each other about which hero agencies they're thinking about going to, Izuku decides not to risk something as sensitive as this. He would know better than anyone, after all. So instead of saying the name out loud, he smoothes the first page of the agencies that nominated him on the table between them.

Todoroki looks at the name Izuku's finger is pointing at, face carefully impassive as he blinks slowly.

Then he brings out a sheet from his own (fairly thick, especially considering he only made it to the second round of the tournament) stack of nominations. He places it right next to Izuku's form, this time facing Izuku, and points to the exact same name that's on both sheets of paper.

Endeavor Hero Agency

They're both silent for a long moment.

"...I hadn't thought I'd made an exactly *good* impression," Izuku

murmurs, for lack of anything contributional to say.

Todoroki hums in response, the corners of his lips quirking up almost imperceptibly as he recalls fondly on how utterly *outraged* the man had looked as Izuku had deliberately *burned* him with his sass and his sharp, sharp grin.

“Hero agencies can nominate two students each,” Todoroki starts slowly. “I guess I expected him to nominate me, but as for you... He was surprisingly quiet the past two days, come to think of it. Like he was thinking over something... or some*one.”*

Todoroki then lifts his eyes to meet Izuku’s.

“My guess is that he was impressed enough by your performance and your victory for him to want you. Even though you two had an... *incident,* he still values competence over anything else. And as you pointed out, you also have a fire quirk, so that might have heightened his interest too.”

“...Huh,” is all that Izuku manages. He really doesn’t know how he feels, or how he even *should* feel about what Todoroki is implying. Though he doesn’t know the man that well outside his hero carrier, considering how Hisashi had been, the fact that *Endeavor* is willing to put aside whatever minor offence Izuku dealt him is mind-blowing on its own.

“I think...” Todoroki begins hesitantly, low enough for his voice not to carry to anyone other than Izuku. “I think I’ll accept it.”

Izuku’s eyes fly to Todoroki’s. Mismatched eyes stare at Endeavor’s name for a moment longer before they flicker up to hold Izuku’s gaze calmly.

“I already told you over text, but I went to meet my mother. She apologized to me and in turn forgave me surprisingly easily, and told me while smiling that me not being held back by anything... *that* is what would make her happy, what would save her. It’s thanks to those words... it’s thanks to *you* that I’m considering this now. Before, I wouldn’t have even thought about going to him. And it’s not that I’ve forgiven or forgotten what he’s done. But it’s still true that he is the No. 2 hero. Even if I don’t like that fact, it’s time for me to accept and experience that with my own two eyes. Unlike him, I... *now,* I can do it.”

Todoroki takes in a breath, then quirks a small, almost imperceptible

smile at Izuku.

“We are not our fathers, after all.”

Izuku stares at Todoroki with something akin to awe. Both of them know that while their situations are similar they aren’t the same, and Endeavor is not Hisashi in so many ways, but what Todoroki has found in himself to do... Izuku doesn’t know if he would be able to do that.

“You really are amazing,” Izuku says honestly, completely sincere and without a hint of embarrassment.

Todoroki’s cheeks flush.

“You... what... how can you even keep... with that sincere *face...”* He drops his face into his palms with a groan.

Izuku blinks in confusion.

“...Todoroki?”

But Todoroki doesn’t even acknowledge Izuku’s call and stubbornly avoids looking at Izuku again. He doesn’t seem to be planning on leaving the confines of his palms for the time being, so Izuku just shrugs and leaves him to it. Instead, he looks over the two sheets of paper lying in between them.

Endeavor. Izuku taps a finger against the name and ponders.

As much as he hates the parallels of his and Todoroki’s backstories, like he said, Endeavor is not Hisashi. And Todoroki has already made the decision to learn under the No. 2 hero.

And while Izuku has never liked Endeavor and likes him even *less* now, that doesn’t change what he’s accomplished as a hero, or how much Izuku had looked up to him as someone who uses fire for heroism and not villainy.

...Izuku had already been thinking that he needs to figure out how to refine and train the fire part of his quirk, after all. No matter what he’s done, just like Todoroki pointed out, it’s still true that Endeavor is the highest ranked hero with a fire quirk.

If Todoroki can put aside his issues with Endeavor, perhaps Izuku can scrounge up the nerve to face the man (and everything he represents)

too.

"...Maybe I'll join you," he ends up murmuring.

Todoroki lifts his face from his hands at that. He meets Izuku's eyes. To anyone else his face may look blank, but Izuku can see the small yet hopeful smile that curves his lips and softens his mismatched eyes.

"I look forward to it."

*

But when All Might tells Izuku that the reclusive hero called Gran Torino nominated him, well, all other options get abruptly and violently thrown out the window. It's the *mentor* of his *mentor*. Izuku really can't say no to that, no matter how much All Might had worryingly shaken like a leaf while remembering said mentor or how much Todoroki had looked subtly disappointed.

Or how much Iida's smile has lost its shine.

Not that there's really anything Izuku can do about that, though not for his lack of concern or effort.

Iida had left the Sports Festival early due to 'family issues,' not even participating in the awarding ceremony to receive the bronze medal he had won alongside Tokoyami.

The news had broken the next day.

The Turbo Hero, Ingenium—though Izuku and Uraraka know him better as Iida's older brother that he's so proud of, Iida Tensei—had been assaulted by the Hero Killer, Stain.

Fortunately, he had managed to escape with his life.

Unfortunately, he had been injured so badly that his life as a *hero* may come to an end.

Once school had started after the short break, contrary to concern Iida had been lively. Almost more so than normal, and that in turn worried Izuku. But there was an almost desperate tinge in his strain for normalcy, so Izuku and Uraraka had respected his wishes and not

pried, opting to swallow their questions and signs of concern for the sake of keeping up the nonchalant yet crumbling front Iida was putting up.

But during the week-long internship, Iida will be without Izuku and Uraraka to act as his buffers between himself and the curious if well-intentioned world. He'll be in Hosu, the city where his older brother lost his life as a hero. And while Izuku tentatively assumes that like Todoroki, Iida is also facing his demons in taking up the mantle of Hosu's protector that his brother had worn, he's still concerned.

So when class 1-A gathers at the train station to leave for each of their internships, Izuku reaches out.

"Iida."

Iida tenses. Uraraka comes to stand beside Izuku.

None of them had said it out loud, but there was an unspoken understanding that Izuku and Uraraka were giving Iida space. Iida appreciates it fiercely, but even he can feel the cautious break of status quo in Izuku's voice and acknowledge that it was a long time coming.

So when he turns to face his two best friends, Iida is smiling.

But.

"Yes, Midoriya?"

Izuku gazes up at that paper thin and weary smile for a moment longer.

He knows that smile.

He knows what a forced smile looks like.

But instead of asking if Iida's alright (of course he isn't) or insisting he talks to them (it doesn't have to be them) Izuku meets Iida's eyes squarely.

"You told me before that you want to be someone I can rely on. I do rely on you. I always did. So Iida... I'm going to count on *you* to tell us when you need us. We'll be there."

Iida's eyes widen. Whatever he was expecting, it was something along the lines of the worried queries, or the unreliable assurances, or the

repetitive condolences that had set Iida's teeth on edge for the past few days. He certainly wasn't expecting Izuku to fully put his faith in him and quietly offer support while not pressuring him.

But Izuku understands that sometimes, when the world feels like it's crumbling around you, soft words are not what you need. Sometimes, being treated like glass only makes you feel more brittle. Sometimes, what you need is a sense of *control.*

So he's giving that to Iida. And Uraraka, taking subtle hints from Izuku, has followed his lead.

If Iida needs space, they'll give it to him. If Iida needs *them,* they'll be there for him.

"I—" Iida's voice wavers, his mask of a smile faltering.

Uraraka puts a hand on his arm in support.

For a moment, it looks like Iida is about to give in and let out what he'd kept bottled up. But then the moment passes and his face closes off again.

"I won't let you down," Iida says instead while plastering that forced smile back on his face.

And with that, he turns around and leaves towards his train.

Despite his unhurried pace, for some reason it looks like Iida is fleeing from them.

Izuku follows Iida's retreating back for a long moment before he's able to turn around to wish Uraraka luck, say his goodbyes to his classmates, send a wave to Todoroki when he notices the other boy gazing in their direction, and catch his own train.

Izuku knows first hand that sometimes words of comfort or best intentions just don't cut it, after all. Some things you just want to bear on your own. So he'll respect Iida's space, and trust him to let them know when and what he needs.

With that thought, Izuku does his best to focus on his own internship. If this Gran Torino is someone who can make All Might shake like a leaf just by *thinking* about him, Izuku better be prepared for anything.

Like this ludicrously shabby building the address leads him to.

Izuku eyes it shrewdly before knocking on the door.

“Hello? Is anyone home?”

No one answers the door.

But you see, Izuku prides himself on his situational awareness and ability to sense human presence. And he’s absolutely positive that he heard just the tiniest sound smother itself as soon as he knocked on the door.

Someone is inside. But are they not answering him because they won’t or because they can’t?

Izuku tries knocking again.

“This is Midoriya Izuku from UA. I heard you nominated me for the internship but... is everything alright?”

Still no answer.

Izuku’s brow creases.

“Excuse me,” he says in warning before he tries the door. It’s unlocked, to his surprise, and it swings open wide, giving him a clear view of the inside of the building without actually having to step inside yet.

What greets him is the sight of what looks like a dead body.

Blood is splattered all over the floor. A small, elderly figure is sprawled face down in that slowly growing puddle. And is that— is that his intestines spilled in the blood?

And over this gruesome sight overlaps others.

All Might, choking out blood as violent coughs wrack his thin body.

Aizawa, broken and mangled, pinned under the monstrous Nomu in a pool of his own blood, his face bashed into the ground with a sickening crack.

Inko, curled into a ball on the floor, trembling with silent sobs as she clutches her hands to her mouth in a desperate attempt not to irritate Hisashi any further.

Izuku can’t *breathe*.

But he *can* move.

In a flash he's dropped the case that holds his newly repaired hero suit and *pulled* himself across the room. He drops to his knees by the old man's side before the case even hits the ground, not caring about how harshly his knees bang on the floor. His mind is blank and his breath is short and his hands are shaking as they feel for a pulse, habit waking up from all those times Hisashi had left Izuku's mother broken and bloody and his scared young self had (tried) to take care of her.

Just as his case finally hits the ground behind him with a clatter, Izuku's fingertips find a strong pulse and the old man jerks his face up from the floor with startling abruptness.

"I'M ALIVE!!!" he announces with almost comical cheer.

Izuku just stares at him for a long moment.

"...You're alive," he finally repeats slowly. "You're alive."

Thank *god.*

The elderly man's happy go lucky smile fades as he squints up at Izuku. Izuku can't even bring himself to care that he's probably fallen for who he supposes is Gran Torino's idea of a joke, or hazing, or whatever it is he'd been trying to pull. He rocks back on his heels, crossing his arms and hunching his back, almost hugging himself as he hides just how badly his hands are trembling.

Izuku should be used to this. Every time Inko had let him out of the closet after Hisashi had beat her, his heart had leapt to his throat as he'd been sure that this, *this* would be the time his mother died. He'd felt it again more recently when he'd seen Aizawa crumpled under the Nomu. He even felt it sometimes when All Might started coughing blood in front of him.

Izuku really should be used to this by now.

A silent moment that feels like an eternity passes. It hasn't even been half a minute since Izuku has opened the door and yet the air is so thick. Izuku is crouched into himself as he pushes down the adrenaline, panic, and sheer relief, while the man he presumes is Gran Torino stares at him, smile replaced by a steadily growing grimace.

Then the pregnant silence is broken as Izuku chokes on a bit of flame.

Oh. He'd forgotten to negate the backlash of the pull he'd used to fly to Gran Torino's side.

Gran Torino just kind of stares at Izuku as he throws up fiery coughs that are smothered in his hand, then sighs and lifts himself out of the puddle of—ketchup, as it turns out.

"Change of tactics," he says wryly, not a trace of his former senile act in his voice or actions. "Midoriya Izuku, you said? Fine."

A whirl of air speeds past Izuku as Gran Torino is suddenly *everywhere*. He slaps the back of Izuku's head none too gently before landing on the wall above the doorway, cutting off Izuku's escape and causing pieces of the wall to crumble off ominously.

The old man grins challengingly.

"Put on your costume and show me what you can do with One For All."

He continues, huffing dismissively.

"I've seen how you use it at the Sports Festival. I knew All Might is fool, but he's even *more* of an incompetent *idiot* when it comes to teaching. Which is why I'm going to have to shape you up."

And when that fails to elicit much of a reaction out of Izuku (honestly, he's more shellshocked than anything) he shoots off again, jabbing Izuku's back to make him stumble, too fast and all over the place to give Izuku any time to even *think*.

"What's the matter?" Gran Torino taunts. "All Might truly is a fool to choose a wet blanket like you as the ninth successor. At this rate, you will *never* be a hero."

And at those words, a familiar laugh echoes in Izuku's mind for the first time in days.

Izuku jerks. He hasn't noticed how blissful its absence had been until it came back full force.

'You haven't forgotten, have you?' Hisashi croons with malicious glee. *'It's like I've always said, boy. You can never reach the sun. You belong down here with me.'*

A ghostly touch brushes across his shoulder blades, his scars,

deceptively light yet burning cold.

'Like father, like son.'

And a few weeks ago, even just a few *days* ago, those words would have been enough to make Izuku *crumble* like a house of cards.

But the thing is, Hisashi isn't the only one Izuku remembers anymore.

Izuku remembers Todoroki putting a hand on his back, the phantom sensation brushing away Hisashi's lingering touch.

"We are not our fathers," he had vowed.

Izuku remembers Aizawa plopping his cast on Izuku's head and rubbing it in an awkward but kind pat.

"You did good," he had assured.

Izuku remembers All Might crushing him against his chest in a firm yet infinitely gentle embrace.

"Always," he had promised. *"I am and will always be* ***so proud*** *of you, my boy."*

Izuku remembers. Hisashi's words may be burned under his eyelids and seared onto his beating heart, but *their* words Izuku grasps with his own two hands and clutches tightly to his chest. He treasures and covets those words, using them as his beacon of light and his source of warmth. Those words are firm as steel and bright as stars, and he takes those words and forges them into his sword and shield.

And *damned* if he'll let anyone take that away from him.

If even Hisashi couldn't do it, then *no one* can make Izuku give up on trying to reach the sun. To live up to All Might.

Not even All Might's own teacher.

So Izuku lifts his head.

He bares his teeth.

And he *grins.*

*

Gran Torino may have made a mistake.

In his defence, the only kid he's ever taught before was Toshinori—Toshinori, with his thick skin and even *thicker* skull—and Nana had already covered most of his internal growth, letting Gran Torino only focus on the straightforward process of beating him into shape.

Also in his defence, there just was *no way* for Gran Torino to know to be a bit more sensitive with Midoriya Izuku. The kid Gran Torino had seen, the kid the *world* had seen on tv at the Sports Festivals had been confidant, strong, relentless, and burning so bright to the point of being *brilliant,* even if he was a little rough around the edges. He didn't think such a bright kid would come from a dark place.

What Gran Tornio knew for certain was that teenagers in general aren't easy to handle, and that any successor Toshinori chose was bound to have inherited at least one of his endearingly annoying (or annoyingly endearing) traits. Like bullheaded stubbornness or wide-eyed obliviousness just to name a few.

So Gran Torino had planned this internship with a mini Toshinori in mind. The dead corpse stunt with the ketchup and sausages would be perfect for first impressions to check the kid's reaction and make him question just how much was coincidental and how much was intentional (gotta keep 'em on their toes) (and also to have some fun, if he's being honest) (what? He's an old man in retirement, entertainment like this doesn't come knocking on his door every day, sue him,) play the senile act to throw him off and push his buttons to see how much tolerance he has, purposely insult Toshinori (because looking up to All Might has clearly been shackling the boy down,) and throw taunts and jibes to rile the kid up (villains will do *much* worse than just calling him names, after all, and this is as much training as physical conditioning is.)

But after seeing the way the kid had reacted to what he thought was a corpse and how *familiarly* he'd felt for a pulse, after seeing how calm yet shaken he'd been while facing what he thought was death, after seeing the utter *despair* in those green eyes for a split second before he'd ducked his head when Gran Torino had taunted he couldn't become a hero—

Well. Like he said. Gran Torino may have made a mistake.

Gran Torino has lived long enough to recognize his mistakes and take responsibility for them. He's just about to drop all of his acts and just straight up talk to the boy, apologize and explain and even comfort him if needed— when Midoriya lifts his head to meet Gran Torino's gaze dead on.

The kid's eyes are no longer hollow. They *burn* with determination and life. And when he draws his lips back from his teeth, that grin is downright *savage.*

"We'll see about that," Midoriya says simply, voice clear and heavy with promise.

Gran Torino just barely has time for a shiver of anticipation and tension to go down his spine before Midoriya shoots towards him.

Gran Torino launches himself out of the way, his mind racing. Somehow he's gotten the kid to finally get serious about showing his quirk. He has no idea what happened to this kid, and he's damn sure he'll get to the bottom of it or have *someone* get to the bottom of it (like that idiot of a Toshinori who can't ever do things by halves and just had to dump this mess of kid in Gran Torino's lap,) but for the moment he decides not to look a gift horse in the mouth and make most of this situation.

Recalling the Sports Festival, Gran Torino quickly runs through what he knows of Midoriya's quirk.

He has One For All, of course, but is nowhere *near* mastering it. He shattered all the fingers in his right hand twice over on the second round of the tournament against Endeavor's son. He was a bit better during the finals, using slight slight increments to enhance his legs since his arms were out of commission, but it was still too rough and stiff to be used reliably.

Part of his original quirk must be some kind of telekinesis or gravity manipulation. It granted him mobility if not finesse, and even seemed to have some sort of penalty. For the moment, it almost seems to work like a downgraded version of Gran Torino's own quirk, letting Midoriya move quickly but only in a straight line.

And then there's that fire. That brilliant, gobsmacking, utterly outrageous fire that burst into *goddamn wings* and casually one-upped the son of the No. 2 hero who's *famous* for his fire quirk. That fire that

also seems to be as self-destructive as One For All, though maybe the kid is already starting to work through it seeing how he didn't seem to be burned after busting out his fiery wings.

Gran Torino keeps these things in mind as he faces off Midoriya. Midoriya, who comes pouncing at Gran Torino again only for him to evade the kid effortlessly, leaving the kid to slam into a wall instead. The brat's fast, he'll give him that, but that telekinesis or gravity or whatever it is has nothing on Gran Torino's fine-tuned jet blasters. Especially in an enclosed space like this.

The kid turns to face Gran Torino again, and he can practically *hear* the gears turning behind those green, green eyes.

Gran Torino can't help the grin that stretches his lips. He's more than fine being in retirement, but sometimes, *oh* has he missed this thrill.

Fancy a zygote like this brat makes him feel alive again.

Midoriya's eyes give up on trying to track Gran Torino. Instead, the kid grabs the broken microwave beside him and throws it to the right. As soon as the hefty device goes sailing from his grasp, he gestures his right hand towards the sofa on the far side of the room and pulls it towards him abruptly, while he flings his left hand to the side and erects a wall of flame.

Gran Torino sees what he's doing. The kid has given up on tracking his movements or trying to match them. So instead, he's made a situation where it doesn't *matter* if he can't keep up with Gran Torino. With the microwave crashing into the furniture on the right, the wall of flames on the left, and the sofa sweeping in towards him, Torino has no choice but to be herded in Midoriya's direction if he wants to avoid injury.

Or at least, that's what this zygote thinks.

"Novice!" Gran Torino crows as he jets himself straight up, neatly avoiding every trap the kid has wired.

Or at least, that's what *Gran Torino* thought.

As soon as Gran Torino's feet leave the ground, the kid lifts his head to follow his movement with his eyes. And he *grins.*

In that moment, Gran Torino realizes. Dodging the microwave, avoiding the fire, jumping over the sofa— none of them had been the

answer. All of them had been a trap.

Seeing the glint in Midoriya's eyes and the sharpness of his grin, Gran Torino realizes with startling clarity that he is *exactly* where this wet behind the ears zygote wants him.

Not so much of a zygote after all, eh?

Gran Torino feels something latch onto him and pull him towards the boy as Midoriya's entire body lights up with what looks like sparks of green electricity for a split second, before he is simply gone.

Even Gran Torino loses sight of the boy for a startled moment before he hears something crashing into the ceiling *behind* him. He whips his head around, but being in the air means there isn't any firm surface for him to properly blast off. Coupled with his surprise, it's enough to make his reactions just a hair too late to avoid the tackle Midoriya catches him in.

A *poof* sounds as they both land directly on the sofa Midoriya had pulled (*purposefully,* Gran Torino realizes now with reluctantly impressed awe) into just the right position to catch them. The boy himself has Gran Torino's ankles in each of his hands, holding the soles pointed down and anchoring him so he can't jet off again.

He must have figured out that Gran Torino's quirk let the soles of his feet blast him around. Then, knowing that he couldn't catch him normally, he'd layered trap upon trap to get Gran Torino *exactly* where he wanted so that even if he couldn't catch *up* with him, he'd still be able to *catch* him by prediction and manipulation. And only when he had Gran Torino *exactly* where he wanted had he busted out his trump card. All while making sure that neither of them would get too hurt by placing the sofa, again, *exactly* in the right place to catch them.

And he hasn't even changed into his costume.

No wonder Toshinori chose this boy, regardless of whatever skeletons he has stuffed in his closet.

"So?" The boy prompts with a devilish grin. "How was that?"

And oh, does Gran Torino feel an answering grin tug on his lips.

He forces it back, though, and instead scoops up his cane from the floor and bonks the boy's head with it.

“It ain’t over till it’s over, brat. Never let your guard down!” he barks gruffly, even if he is secretly impressed.

He wiggles his legs until the boy lets them go, then sits up properly on the sofa and pats the seat next to him.

“Care to explain what you just did there?”

Midoriya blinks, likely a little thrown by the gap between Gran Torino’s gruff tone and inviting gesture, though he follows wordlessly and settles on the seat next to him.

“I realized that you were probably trying to provoke me on purpose, so I wondered *why*. You’re the one who nominated me in the first place, after all. You mentioned All Might a lot specifically, you know about One For All, and I assume you saw the Sports Festival. So I guessed you were trying to teach me something about the way I use my quirk. We already know that going all out and using 100% breaks my fingers, and so I used the 5% I can handle on my legs during the finals, but it was stiff and unwieldy. So I had to think of a better way to use One For All.”

At this point, a small smile curves Midoriya’s lips.

“Someone recently told me that even if we inherit them, my quirk is *my* power. Thinking of that in the context of One For All, I had the idea to use the upper limit I can handle on *all* parts of my body at all times. Like a microwave evenly distributing heat. But even then I wasn’t sure I could catch up with you. So I tried to make a situation where I *knew* I could.”

This time, Midoriya points a finger at a cushion that has fallen to the floor and crooks his finger at it. It gently soars towards him, and he catches it and pats it down in place on the sofa.

“My original quirk lets me pull things towards me, or pull *me* towards them if it’s too heavy. It’s kind of like a grappling hook, I guess. I can only pull one thing at a time though, and as consequence of using the pull, I have to *push* a bit of fire out of myself,” he says, this time curling his left hand into a cage as a small ball of flame swirls inside. “And vice versa. But if I try to suppress it, it bursts out of me like when I coughed out fire earlier. It’s like when a water hose bursts if you block the nozzle.”

Midoriya closes his fist and extinguishes the fire.

“So, um, that’s pretty much it. Quirk analysis is my specialty. I knew the tools I have, I guessed your quirk by observing, I have pretty good situational awareness, and knew that the new use of One For All would throw you off for at least a split second, so saved it to use at the last moment.”

Gran Torino just kind of stares at Midoriya who’s been full on muttering away as he explains his quirk and seems to grow a bit self-conscious only now that he’s done rambling. At this boy that has three *powerful* quirks and compares them to a *grappling hook,* a *water hose,* and a goddamn *microwave.*

This kid.

And Gran Torino can’t keep it in anymore.

He *laughs.*

“Impressive,” he admits. “You figured out what I’d been aiming to teach you within the first half hour you stepped foot in here.”

He thinks back on the moment Midoriya started fighting back. *“We’ll see about that,”* the brat had said with a grin.

It looks like they will.

And oh, does Gran Torino look forward to it.

He hops off the sofa.

“We’re still going to have to refine that new technique of yours, though. Situational awareness or not, you’re going to have to learn to harness it, make it yours, and make it *sing.”*

He pauses and looks back at the boy.

“Got a name for it?”

Midoriya *grins.*

“Full Cowl.”

*

Izuku hasn't ever really thought of it before, but he now realizes that he's always thought of his quirks as not really his own, but others'.

One For All as All Might's power, of course. But it had started far before that.

He had thought the pull as his mother's.

He had thought the push of fire as Hisashi's.

But.

"Even if we inherited it, it's our power," Todoroki's soft voice affirms in his memories.

And he's right. Izuku had been too cautious with his quirks, like they were something he was borrowing and not something that was *his* and *him.* Hell, he'd spent most of his life actively *not* using his quirk to the point where anyone who hadn't seen his official records wondered if he was quirkless.

Considering that other people have been playing around with and training their quirks since they were four, Izuku has a *lot* of catching up to do.

He's been a bit better about it once he started training with All Might, trying to figure out his quirk, find ways around the backlash, and, with Todoroki's help, finally trying to train the fire part of his quirk too. And now, he at last has a better grip on One For All too.

It's still a measly 5%, but it's still a world of a difference compared to before. Full Cowl slots in perfectly with his original quirk, boosting his agility while negating the jarring momentum of his *pull* and compensating for the lack of punch in his *push* without having to worry about any backlash.

That doesn't stop Gran Torino from utterly *trouncing* him after that first time Izuku had the element of surprise, though. In between breaks, meals, and short mentions of All Might's own time as Gran Torino's student, Gran Torino thoroughly wipes the floor with Izuku.

Not that Izuku would have it any other way. If anything—considering how much All Might had shaken when thinking of his past mentor and how Gran Torino himself mentioned that he'd beaten All Might until he'd *puked*— Izuku would tentatively guess that he's having a far easier time than All Might once had.

It may just be that Gran Torino is going easy on Izuku since he's still not as good as All Might once was. Or it may be that Gran Torino's prowess, however formidable it still is, has waned with time.

Probably both.

Either way, these past few days have been fairly good. Izuku hasn't had the opportunity to just train without thinking of anything else since before the UA entrance exam when he was preparing his body with All Might. After that he'd been thrust with the weight of carrying One For All, the dilemma of his quirk, meeting Aizawa, the League of Villains, and the chaotic whirlwind that was the Sports Festival. Training with Gran Torino, however, allows no time for anything else, and he appreciates the simplicity of it.

Gran Torino had even apologized for how their initial meeting had gone, in that gruff but straightforward way of his. Izuku had been taken back by that since he'd already figured out it was probably the elderly man purposely provoking him to haze and size him up. But it seems like Gran Torino has a set of standards that he stubbornly insists on, even with himself, much like Iida.

Actually, in that regard...

Izuku has a theory.

His long standing theory is that a person's quirk reflects their personality traits.

He's not sure if it's the case that the quirk manifests in a way that visibly shows the wielder's personality, or if the personality is shaped by the quirk. Maybe there isn't really a knowable order, like the chicken and the egg. It's more or less apparent depending on the person, of course, but Izuku has seen enough evidence to believe it to be *true*.

Take Uraraka, for example. Her sweet, earnest, compassionate personality brings happiness to everyone she interacts with. She had taken the nickname—*Deku*—that had been *created* to weigh Izuku down and had made it light and freeing. And just like her personality, her quirk relieves gravity from everything and everyone she touches.

Kirishima with his rock hard determination. Aoyama's twinkling wink. Ojiro's straightforward yet reliable character. Sato's surprisingly sweet side.

Hell, just look at *Bakugo*. You could take one look at him and describe both his personality and his quirk with the same single word.

Explosive.

Izuku is in the middle of his musings when Gran Torino suddenly announces a change of pace.

“Fighting against the same opponent is only going to build bad habits. Get a move on! We’re going out of town to catch some villains!” Gran Torino declares with his usual abruptness.

...Like he was saying, Izuku has a theory.

Much like Iida has the tendency to barrel through life with his endearing eccentricity, Gran Torino also tends to zoom off unabashedly and leave others floundering in his wake. But unlike Iida, who’s more straightforward, narrow focused, and finds it harder to make sharp turns, Gran Torino is *all over* the place. Izuku can see it in the way he had rapidly donned and shed each act when they’d first met in his effort to provoke Izuku, and again in the way he just springs an impromptu villain hunting session.

But again, Izuku wouldn’t have it any other way. He just quirks a small smile as he follows Gran Torino. Despite their rickety start, he has quickly come to genuinely like and respect this eccentric hero that was once All Might’s teacher, and is now his as well.

On the train, Izuku flips out his phone. The [Passing through Hosu! How are you doing, Iida?] he’d sent to Iida is marked read but unreplied to. Considering how Iida normally replies within three minutes of reading a message and is *insistent* on having the last word in a text version of ‘no you hang up first,’ his lack of response is worrying. Of course, it could just be that he’s busy with the internship, but considering how off he’s been lately...

Izuku shakes his head and makes himself turn off the chat log with Iida. He’d promised Iida that he’d let *him* decide when he needed Izuku, so he won’t pry.

Instead, he flicks over to the growing chat log with Todoroki.

[Passing Hosu on my way to Shibuya. You doing alright?]

He doesn’t get to see the hurried [Im curreteltny in Hosu righ now] that has typos Todoroki wouldn’t normally make, as if the words had

tumbled out of him in a rush. Izuku doesn't get to see the [Yes, all is well. Thank you.] that follows almost instantly, a bit more composed and formal at first glance but actually glowing with the warm regard compressed in those few words. He doesn't even get to see the [But it would have been better with you.] that is sent a few long moments later, awkward and fumbling, typed with great hesitation and painstaking care.

Izuku doesn't get to see them, because before he can, something far too familiar crashes into the side of the train.

"Nomu?!" Izuku gapes. Because this being may not look exactly the same as the black skinned hulk that still haunts Izuku's nightmares crouched atop Aizawa, but Izuku would still recognize that distinct exposed brain and popping eyes (*four* eyes this time) anywhere.

Screams fill the air.

"Stay here, kid!" Gran Torino orders as he jets off, body slamming the Nomu out of the train and away from the civilians.

"Gran Torino!" Izuku calls, but the hero is already too far away.

Instead of the hero, what Izuku sees is Hosu city riddled with explosions and screams.

His breath catches. Gran Torino had told him to stay put. Izuku doesn't even have a hero licence or supervision of a pro.

But there are people out there. There's a *Nomu* out there.

And Izuku has never been able to leave someone in need of help.

Sorry, Gran Torino, Izuku thinks with a grimace as he vaults over broken seats and heads towards the hole the Nomu and Gran Torino had left through.

"Hey!" a member of the crew calls to Izuku has he speeds by. "It's dangerous! We have to keep together and wait for the heroes to..." he trails off when Izuku turns to face him.

"You're that... Midoriya?"

It pays to have won the UA Sports Festival live on national television.

Izuku had gotten so much attention in the days following the Sports Festival that he (partly flattered, partly flustered, and partly just

straight out terrified) had started going to school half an hour earlier to avoid as much attention.

But in circumstances like this, having his name and face known is undeniably helpful.

The fact that Izuku is a known UA student who won the Sports Festival coupled with the hero costume he's wearing now seems to give the crew pause, as if he's unsure if he should stop Izuku or not anymore. Izuku isn't, technically, supposed to be running off on his own, but Izuku takes advantage of the fact that *he* doesn't know that. While the crew member is hesitating, Izuku nods to him as if to say 'you do your job, I'll do mine' before jumping out the gaping hole.

He turns on Full Cowl and *runs.*

Once Izuku hits the streets, he can spot a clear flow in the panicked crowd. They're all running away from the centre of commotion. Which, of course, is exactly why Izuku runs straight towards it.

And once he gets there, the sight that greets him looks like it's a scene straight from hell.

Buildings and vehicles are shattered to pieces all around. There are Nomus, not just one but *two,* and neither of them is even the one he'd seen just a moment before. Gran Torino isn't within sight either, but the dozen or so heroes who *are* here are clearly out of their depth.

Izuku's eyes flicker about, trying to access the situation and how best to help.

But then, a cry grabs hold of his attention.

"Tenya!" he hears someone call in distress. Izuku's head snaps their way to find the Normal Hero, Manual. He should be the internship supervisor of Iida...

Izuku's blood runs cold.

Iida.

Iida, whose presence is glaringly absent.

Dread fills his veins. And Izuku should be used to this feeling by now.

But he isn't.

Before he knows it, Izuku has shot forward in a burst of green static.

“Where’s Iida?!” he gasps as he skids to a stop at Maunal’s side, his usually impeccable manners nowhere to be found.

Manual jumps at his sudden appearance. To his credit, the hero doesn’t attack Izuku on the spot but instead takes him in. His eyes flash over Izuku’s obviously young body, the hero suit he’s wearing despite it, and the familiar face that has been broadcasted all over the country.

“You— Midoriya? You should be evacuating. Where’s your supervisor?” Manual manages, probably having figured out that Izuku is also here for his internship.

“Busy,” Izuku replies curtly, “as you are. Manual, please. *Where is Iida?”*

The Normal Hero looks like he’s going to insist, but then a roar from a Nomu and panicked shouts from the heroes fill the air. Manual winces, then seems to steel himself.

“I last saw him in the alleyway three blocks from here,” he says pointing to the direction while stepping forward to join his comrades. “And Midoriya, be *careful.* Tenya might be tracking down the Hero Killer. Don’t engage, just find and bring Tenya back!”

And with that load taken off his mind, the hero runs off once more into the fray.

Izuku’s mind is reeling. Iida, tracking down the Hero Killer Stain? …*Why?*

He doesn’t understand, but soon shakes off his confusion. There’s no time for that. So instead, Izuku charges up Full Cowl once again and shoots off, weaving through deserted roads and dark alleys.

“Iida!” Izuku calls. *“Iida!”*

The longer no one answers him the tighter his throat closes up.

But Izuku pushes down his welling fear, grits his teeth, and forces his legs faster.

It’s when he turns another nondescript corner that he finds them.

Iida is lying facedown on the ground. Stain is standing over him,

pinning him to the floor with one foot while a hand is already bringing down the katana raised in the air.

He brings it down on Iida's neck.

Blood sprays in the air.

And Izuku really should be used to this by now. Used to the sensation of wondering if you're watching someone die. Used to the utter terror you might lose someone. He's felt this while watching Aizawa, All Might, and countless times watching his mother. Once more watching Iida shouldn't be anything new.

He really, really should be used to this.

But he isn't.

He *isn't.*

A strangled sound leaves Izuku's mouth only for it to be whipped away in the wind as he *flies* forward. He *pulls* at Stain with all his fear and desperation, and the force of it is strong enough to make the villain fold over into himself almost comically as he's yanked backwards. Izuku dodges him, making him ram into the far wall, and sprints to Iida's side.

"Iida," Izuku gasps, kneeling down beside his friend and automatically feeling for a pulse with shaking hands. There's a long cut in Iida's throat, blood gushing out in terrifying torrents, the red rapidly pooling under him and staining his previously pristine white armour.

But he's still breathing, if panicked and quick. His pulse yammers under Izuku's fingertips, and his eyes are focused enough to find Izuku.

"Mi... Midori...?"

"Stop that," Izuku says, coughing on a bit of fire as he clamps one hand over Iida's neck to apply pressure on the wound. "Don't talk."

Thankfully it looks like Izuku had been able to pull Stain off before his blade went clean through, but the wound is still bleeding profusely. At this rate, Iida just might bleed to death if they don't get him medical attention *soon.*

If only he'd been just a bit faster to arrive, just a bit quicker to find

Iida, just a few *seconds* sooner…

But Izuku was too late.

Too late.

“Midoriya,” Iida says, and though his voice is still hoarse it’s no longer something on the verge of a gurgle. “What are you doing here?”

His question almost fills Izuku with something that feels suspiciously like hysteria.

“Me?” he asks back, and there’s something almost wild in his voice. “What are *you* doing here alone? You could have told Manual and his agency! You could have told *me!* You said you’ll let me know if you need me!”

“I didn’t *want* you!” Iida bursts out.

Izuku freezes.

Not only was Izuku too late, but Iida doesn’t even *want* Izuku’s help.

But then again…

Inko had not wanted Izuku to step between her and Hisashi. Bakugo hadn’t wanted to be rescued by Izuku from the slime villain. Aizawa hadn’t wanted to be protected by his own student. Shinsou hadn’t wanted Izuku to help him. Even Todoroki hadn’t wanted Izuku to help him.

And Izuku has never let that stop him.

Izuku tightens his jaw.

A sort of calm falls upon him. Iida’s rejection and his own mess of emotions fail to impact him as much anymore. Izuku knows it’ll come back to bite him later, all the horror and terror and guilt and panic, but at this moment all of that is smoothed over by the overpowering need to *save.*

Izuku taps his phone discreetly with his free hand behind his back.

“Sorry, Iida,” he says in a deceptively light tone. “But I’ve never been able to leave someone in need of help. Besides, All Might said that meddling in others’ business is the essence of a hero.”

Iida's face falls while another voice finally breaks into their conversation.

"Oho," Stain breathes, his face lit up with unholy delight. The villain has picked himself off the wall and is now staring at Izuku with unnerving intensity.

"All Might, eh? And you're not just some fanboy, you're a true follower of his ideals. Not only that, but you have the brains and skills to back it up. You blindsided *me* and purposefully threw me as far away from your friend as you could, even within that short moment," he says gleefully.

Izuku, whose gaze had automatically trailed up from Iida at Stain's voice, catches sight of another figure slumped against a wall. He recognizes him as the pro hero Native, and while his eyes are open and responsive, his body slags like a rag doll. Or, like Iida.

Another one, Izuku thinks as he bites his lip. Another one he'd been too late to save completely.

"So many fools are out there that are nothing but talk," Stain continues. "But you..."

And with the villain's eyes boring into him, Izuku makes up his mind. He can't run away from Stain with two wounded people. He can't fight Stain since he needs to keep pressure on Iida's throat. So all he can do is buy time and hope that reinforcements are on the way. He's sent a mass text to his classmates with his location; hopefully at least one of them will clue in and ask someone to contact the hero agencies in Hosu and send some pros.

Besides. Izuku had always been good at turning negative attention away from someone else and onto himself.

"Thanks, but no thanks. Despite the fact that this is the most I've been complimented in the past few days, I'd rather not be by you," Izuku runs his mouth. "Probably has something to do with, oh, I don't know, the fact that you're a villain with the moniker *Hero Killer,* or maybe the fact that you tried to *kill my friend."*

Then he puts on his best Aizawa deadpan face as he places his free hand over his chest.

"Don't misunderstand; it's not me, it's you."

A disbelieving silence descends on the alleyway. Iida and Native are staring at Izuku like they're questioning what they've just heard. Or questioning Izuku's sanity. Both of them seem to be of the opinion that provoking a serial killer is simply *not* something you just casually do.

Well. Welcome to Izuku's life, he supposes.

After a moment of stunned silence, Stain throws his head back with a bark of laughter.

"Ohh, and got a mouth on you too, huh? No wonder Shigaraki likes you."

Shigaraki.

Izuku swallows and grins almost reflexively, hiding behind it like a mask. Now he has a new goal: fish for more information while still buying time.

"Didn't know the Hero Killer teamed up with the League of Villains," he says in a deceptively casual voice. Izuku figured out Shigaraki and pushed all the right buttons in the few sparse moments he had back at the USJ. And while Stain is nowhere as simple as Shigaraki's childishness, he's done his research on Stain, what with Iida's situation being what it is. He can make an educated guess. "I would have thought your ideals clash with his... *lack* of one."

"It does," Stain scoffs. "I'll be going back to deal with him later. But did you know he carries around a photo of you?"

No, he *did not.*

A shiver goes down Izuku's spine. Izuku himself doesn't dare take his eyes off Stain but he sees Iida's eyes dart to his face from the corner of his vision. He must have felt the tremble going through the hand Izuku is keeping on his neck.

Izuku recalls Shigaraki sinking into Kurogiri's portal with a maniac grin stretching his wrinkled lips behind the severed hand on his face.

"Let's play again," he had said.

And now he's apparently carrying around a photo of Izuku and showing it off to serial killers.

"...Okay, wow, that's not creepy *at all,"* he manages to bite out.

Stain shrugs.

"He's got taste, at the very least. Didn't expect it, but it's one thing we can agree on."

And wow, again, that's *so not creepy at all.*

"Thanks but no thanks," Izuku manages in a strangled voice. "I'd really rather keep my fanatic villain count to zero."

"I should hope so," a new voice intervenes. "You're enough of a lightning rod for trouble as it is."

A bolt of fire shoots out and drives Stain further away from the three. Izuku whips his head around.

"Todoroki," he breathes.

"Midoriya," he returns while stepping into the alleyway. "Next time, be more specific. I was almost late."

Izuku lets out a shaky puff of laughter. "What do you mean late, you got here in under five minutes!"

To anyone else, Todoroki might look collected and calm. But Izuku can read the minute tells. He can hear the ragged breathing that Todoroki is stifling, evidence of how urgently he had rushed here. He can see how Todoroki's gaze flicker about to take in the situation, dwelling the longest on Izuku and twitching subtly at the puddle of blood growing under Iida. He can feel the fear and relief in those mismatched eyes.

Izuku understands exactly how terrified on their behalf Todoroki must have been. So he does his best to reassure the other boy.

He grins.

"You're using your left side. And you don't look like half an icicle anymore!" he says in reference to Todoroki's new costume, overly bright on purpose.

It's partly to make light of the situation and reassure Todoroki. But it might also partly be the nerves and steadily building hysteria getting to him.

Thankfully, Todoroki doesn't call Izuku out. Instead, he rolls with it. Just like before, they just seem to *click* and a look of understanding flashes over Todoroki's face before it's smoothed over. The edge on his expression has thawed with relief and the corner of his lips quirk up just the tiniest bit. As with all the other times Izuku had ventured to joke with him, Todoroki meets him part way with a dry quip of his own.

"And you still look like a bunny."

"I do *not*— "

Todoroki doesn't even dignify Izuku's indignant protest with a reply as he stomps his right foot and sends out a path of ice. The ice crystallizes and rises up, making the prone form of Native slip, slide, and roll over towards Izuku and Iida.

Todoroki takes a stance in front of the rest of them, facing Stain.

"Don't worry. The pros are on their way," he says in a voice that purposefully carries clearly to Stain.

The villain tsks, clearly irritated at having been interrupted so many times.

"Don't let him cut you," Native gasps from the floor. "That kid and I couldn't move since he cut us. That's probably his quirk!"

"Explains all the blades," Todoroki mutters as his eyes trail over to lock his gaze with Izuku. An entire conversation seems to pass between them in that split second.

Izuku himself isn't paralyzed, but he needs to keep pressure on Iida's throat since the other boy can't do it himself.

That means that Todoroki is the only one up against Stain right now.

"I'm—"

I'm so sorry, is bitten off before it can be formed. Izuku can't even dare utter those words, trauma mingling with terror and horror at the thought that his message is the reason Todoroki is in danger right now. Izuku had been hoping for a group of pro heroes when he'd sent that message. While he's thankful Todoroki came (quick and loyal and brave and *alone*) he's also *terrified* on his behalf.

Not only was he too late to save Iida, but he also *called* Todoroki to Stain.

But there is no regret or resentment in Todoroki's eyes. If anything, he seems relieved to be here.

"Don't. I want to be here. And I'm the best suited for a long range fight anyways. I'll just keep my distance—"

His reassurance is cut short as a knife sails through the air and grazes his cheek. Todoroki just barely manages to make ice shoot up quickly enough to block the other jagged blade Stain swings at him. But Stain glances upwards, and Todoroki instinctively follows his eyes to find a katana whirling down towards him from the sky.

And taking advantage of his moment of distraction, Stain grabs Todoroki's collar and yanks him forward to lick the blood off the cut on his cheek.

"—!!"

His long tongue sweeps across Todoroki's cheek and almost brushes the wound when a burst of fire pushes Stain back. But it isn't Todoroki's fire. Before he has time to think on it, something *pulls* Todoroki away. Todoroki stumbles slightly but quickly rights himself, looking back at Izuku with gratitude in his eyes.

Izuku has his free hand outstretched, flickers of residue flame licking his fingertips.

"Blood," he says tersely. "It's not just a cut, but he needs to ingest blood."

"Heh," Stain acknowledges with a smirk. "Working that brain of yours, I see. Good."

Izuku ignores Stain's fixation with him and grits his teeth.

Quirk analysis is Izuku's specialty after all. If a cut is all Stain needs then Todoroki should have gone limp the moment the first knife grazed his cheek. But he hadn't. And Stain had laid trap upon trap so that he could either cut him more or lick Todoroki's cut.

Izuku's mind is in overdrive. He replays the short and fast exchange that just took place within seconds.

He thinks of the knife thrown at Todoroki's head, easily dodged but leaving a cut that can be exploited later. Stain had used the moment Todoroki was caught off guard to close the distance and swing the jagged saw-like blade in close quarters. But even before all that he had thrown the katana up in the air, predicting the precise timing it would come spiralling down. Then when he needed the distraction, Stain had purposefully drawn Todoroki's attention away from himself to the katana. And in the split second Todoroki looked up, the villain lunged for the cut on his cheek.

The knife, the blade, the katana. It didn't matter which one Todoroki fell for. None of them had been the answer. All of them had been a trap.

Izuku presses his lips into a thin line. His mind is whirling, thoughts flickering with focused intensity.

Out of all the people he has ever met, Stain has the fighting style that is the most similar to Izuku's own. Both of them rely on speed rather than brute force. Both of them are strategic planners, layering trap upon trap to snare their target absolutely.

But compared to Izuku, Stain far outstrips him in strength, experience, and sheer ruthless brutality.

So in other words, he's a bigger, stronger, faster, *crueller* version of what Izuku could be. Upgraded in every aspect in a sinister way.

And that thought *terrifies* Izuku.

Despite Izuku's faith in Todoroki's abilities, this is the villain with the moniker the *Hero Killer*.

He can't take Stain on his own.

But Izuku can't stand by his side.

He grits his teeth as Todoroki sends waves of ice towards Stain. He tries freezing the villain to the ground or erecting walls to obscure his vision, but nothing keeps the villain back for more than a few seconds at a time.

"No..." Iida gasps from his position prone on the ground. Izuku can feel his pulse racing under his palm, pumping out blood all the faster. "Both of you shouldn't be here. I inherited my brother's name. *I* have to do this!"

“Why?” Izuku can’t help but burst out. He’d meant to tell Iida to stop speaking and calm down (least he bleed out faster) but frustration and adrenaline gets the better of him. He promised Iida he'd be there if he needed him, but Iida almost died because Izuku was too late. They both might have died if Todoroki hadn’t come. And they *all* might still die. He can’t— he can’t *bear* that, and yet Iida... “Why do you insist on doing this alone?!”

Iida looks like he wants to cry right now, looking desperate and apologetic and determined and frustrated and so, so *mad* at the same time.

“Stain attacked my brother. Tensei was *my hero,* and Stain made sure he would *never* be a hero again. Of *course* I want to take him on my own! You understand, don’t you?!”

Iida looks up at Izuku. Izuku has no idea what Iida sees in his expression, but the righteous fury in Iida’s eyes flickers and falters upon looking at Izuku’s face.

“You... you *don’t,”* Iida says with dawning realization.

And in a startling moment of clarity, Izuku realizes as well. He realizes the reason he hadn’t been able to guess where Iida was himself and had to ask Manual. He realizes the reason he hadn’t been able to find Iida quick enough. He realizes what sets him apart from Iida, from even Todoroki.

“You,” Stain breathes, coming to the same conclusion.

Izuku raises his head from Iida to see that both Stain and Todoroki have come to a temporary pause and are staring at him with disbelief.

“You,” Stain says again, and for some reason he looks *gleeful,* like he’s unexpectedly struck gold, like he’s found something *precious.*

“You don’t *understand* revenge.”

*

Stain laughs *delightedly*.

“I can’t believe it!” he says, throwing his head back to crow in

laughter. “To think there’s actually someone who’s so selfless that he doesn’t even understand the very *concept* of revenge!”

Iida is at loss for words. He had known that Midoriya is infinitely kind, that he puts others before himself, but to think that his selflessness extends to the point that he doesn’t even understand revenge when Iida himself is so consumed by it...

It blows his mind and dampers his blazing hatred.

He can feel how the hand Midoriya has clasped against the wound on his neck—the hand that’s literally the *only thing keeping him alive*—is shaking and trembling violently.

Stain grins at Midoriya.

“I knew you were different from these phonies, but this, this just proves that you’re *so much more.* With a mindset like that, you might even be on par with All Might.”

And he’s right, Iida thinks dully. Hadn’t even All Might himself taken interest in Midoriya? But Iida had been so consumed with his own vengeance that he hadn’t even spared a thought for the other hero that had been slumped in the alleyway.

“Save him first,” Stain had told him with disgust, *“if you call yourself a hero.”*

And that had been exactly what Midoriya had done, hadn’t it? He had flown to Iida's rescue, finding him even when Iida had purposefully ignored the hand held out to him, and had stayed even when Iida rejected him.

“No,” Midoriya grits out, and it sounds like it’s costing him to force out his voice. “This just proves how little you really understand about what it means to be a hero.”

With that he makes a sharp gesture with his free hand, and a knife that Iida hadn’t even noticed comes flying towards him. It looks like Stain had thrown it in Todoroki’s direction, hoping that everyone was too distracted. The knife pivots mid-air inches from Todorki’s chest and embeds itself in Midoriya’s forearm instead. Todoroki gasps a strangled breath that sounds like *“Midoriya,”* and in the next moment he’s hurling ice at Stain with vengeance.

Stain breaks through the wall of ice Todoroki had made and throws a

handful of knives at him. Midoriya *pulls* Todoroki away while also *pushing* Stain back with a concentrated burst of fire, still crouched next to Iida and keeping one hand on his wound.

But unlike before, Stain seems to recover even faster and stronger. Perhaps talking to Midoriya had awakened something inside him, or perhaps the countdown ticking to when the pros will inevitably arrive is driving him, but he's more fierce than ever before. Todoroki is at his limits erecting wall after icy wall, trusting Midoriya to see the bigger picture and keep him away from Stain's frenzied blades.

"No, stop it," Iida pleads. "I can't take it..."

"Then stand up!" Todoroki barks. "Stand up and face who you really want to become!"

His furied shout sends a jolt down Iida's spine.

"I am Ingenium," he remembers telling Stain. *"The hero who will take you down!"*

But he also remembers the real Ingenium, his brother, how much Iida had looked up to him all his life, how despite coming from a whole family of heroes it had been *Tensei* he chose as his role model, and how his older brother had let out an embarrassed but pleased laugh at his words.

He remembers Midoriya, how much Iida had looked up to both his physical and internal strength even though they were the same age, how much the words that he relies on Iida had touched him, how much he hadn't wanted to let him down, and how his subtle kindness of letting him have his space had soothed him.

And he had flung aside his brother's ideals and slapped away Midoriya's outstretched hand.

Now both Todoroki and Midoriya are bleeding for him. He can see the bloody cut on Todoroki's cheek as he wrestles with Stain and he can feel the blood from Midoriya's forearm drip down and mingle with the puddle of Iida's own blood.

Stain is right. He's not like them. Not like his brother, who said he wants to be the kind of hero that can help a crying child. Not like Todoroki, who abandoned everything and came running the moment he received Midoriya's text.

Not like Midoriya.

...Be that as it may, he can't drag them down anymore.

"Midoriya," he calls quietly. His mind races as he thinks, for the first time, not about himself, but of how to help his friends.

"You can use fire too. So I need you... to cauterize my neck."

Midoriya takes in a sharp breath.

"Iida," he hisses. *"No."*

"Midoriya," he counters. "Be reasonable. You're good at that. Since I can't put pressure on my own wound, you've had to do it for me, rendering you immobile. But Todoroki cannot win against Stain on his own. I'll— I'll bleed to death without you, but if you cauterize the wound, then you'll prevent that and also be able to fight with Todoroki."

"I know that, but— Iida, I don't have enough control, what if I hurt you, I can't— I *can't."*

And there's something almost fearful in Midoriya's voice, the note of his words bordering on pleading.

"The pros will be here soon," Midoriya says, and it sounds like he's trying to convince himself as much as Iida. "Just hang on, Iida, and don't think of doing anything drastic. My fire isn't..."

He trails off, but Iida locks his eyes with Midoriya the best he can with how he's paralyzed.

"You won't hurt me, Midoriya. You'll be *saving* me. And Todoroki. So please," Iida argues. Almost begs. "Please, don't make me watch you bleed for me more than you already have."

Midoriya closes his eyes.

A brief moment passes before they re-open, vibrantly green, hard with determination and shining with unshed tears.

He rips off his bunny-ear-like hood and stuffs the green fabric inside Iida's mouth.

"Bite down on it," he instructs tersely. "This is going to hurt *a lot.* Trust me."

Before Iida can remind Midoriya that he'll be saving, not hurting Iida, Midoriya finally takes his hand off Iida's wound and instead holds molten fire over it.

A scream builds inside Iida's throat even as he clamps his teeth down on the cloth. He can tell, even while choking down his screams, that Midoriya is doing his best to make the flame as small as possible while still welding his flesh together. It doesn't matter. It still hurts.

Midoriya was right.

It hurts a *lot.*

*

Shit, Todoroki thinks as Stain dodges around both his ice and fire.

"Hasn't anyone ever told you that relying on your quirk makes you sloppy?" the villain asks as he darts into close range and whips out his katana.

The tip of the blade makes a shallow but long wound on Todoroki's abdomen, slicing through his suit and skin. Todoroki makes to envelop the villain in ice, but before he can, Stain tilts the katana to his face and licks the blood off the blade.

"Shit," he says out loud this time as he crumples to the ground. He can't move a finger, and without being able to see or move properly he can't use his quirk effectively. "Midoriya—!"

He's about to call out a warning when a green blur shoots out from behind him and tackles Stain away. In the same instant, it detaches from Stain to leave him flying back while the bolt of crackling green lighting dashes back in a flash and carefully picks Todoroki up and flies back to set him down gently next to Native. Stain throws a barrage of knives at them, but only a few graze Midoriya's legs while most of them are blown away by a powerful kick from a white blur. Then both are gone in a flash again as they charge towards Stain.

"Midoriya... and Iida?" Todoroki gapes from where Midoriya had leaned him against a wall.

But Izuku doesn't have time to focus on his friend as he grits his teeth and throws himself at Stain with everything he has.

He knows that Iida was right. Cauterizing his wound was the best option to heighten the chances of all four of them living longer. But if only Izuku hadn't been too late, they wouldn't have had to do it in the first place. He wouldn't have had to make Iida *scream.*

But he *did* make him scream, and he *was* too late. So Izuku grits his teeth against the tears building up and bares his teeth instead.

Never again, he promises himself.

"Never again," Iida says, as if echoing his thoughts, "will I let this happen. I'm sorry. Stain was right about me. But I won't break, because if I do, then the name Ingenium dies with me."

Stain scoffs.

"I don't buy it. People don't change so easily, and you're a fake who prioritized your own desires. A cancer on this society warped by so-called heroes." He brings his blade down on Iida again.

"Like I said," Izuku interferes as he *pulls* the blade away from Iida, "you have no idea what it means to be a hero."

The blade is pulled clean out of Stain's grasp. Due to Izuku moving around erratically with Full Cowl, the blade impales Izuku's left calf. His knee buckles, but he pushes through the pain and *pulls* yet another knife that Stain throws at Iida's throat. This time he manages to catch the knife, though he catches it by the blade.

"Midoriya!" Todoroki and Iida call in alarm.

Izuku's bloodied hand carelessly throws the knife over his shoulder, then breaks off the unwieldy handle sticking out of his leg and tosses it after the knife.

"Ice these over so he can't use them again," he says shortly. He hears a crackle of ice as Todoroki does so even as he calls Izuku's name worriedly. Then he drags his unresponsive leg along as he takes off again. Todoroki is out of commission, Stain is strong enough to pierce through Iida's armour, and Iida has lost too much blood to even be moving in the first place. Izuku *has* to fight.

Stain throws more knives at the vulnerable Todoroki, but this time

Iida blocks them by catching the knives in his own arm. Then he shoots off again, whizzing around Stain's attacks and looking for an opening.

The glint in Stain's eyes is frenzied. Far from being intimidated by Todoroki's threat that the pros are coming, he seems to be dead set on killing Native and Iida before they do. And while that makes him faster, stronger, and infinitely more dangerous, it also makes him just the slightest bit sloppy.

Just enough for Izuku to exploit.

Izuku blasts a wall of fire behind Stain to cut off his retreat, then *pulls* himself towards Stain. The villain jumps up in the air to avoid him and the fire. But that's exactly where Izuku wanted him.

Iida follows into the air with a burst of his engines, and Izuku pivots with Full Cowl and jumps up on Stain's other side.

Caught between them in the air, Stain has nowhere to go.

Izuku thinks he sees himself reflected in Stain's eye in the split second before his fist connects with Stain face and Iida's kick hits the villain's spine.

"I will defeat you! This time as a villain, and a hero!" Iida shouts as he flips and connects a second kick.

A resounding *crack* rings in the air and Stain's eyes lose focus. All three of them fall from the air, and Todoroki catches them with a hastily built wave of ice. Izuku lands on his bad leg and has to bite back a yelp as the force jars the portion of the blade still embedded inside.

He ignores the pain, though, and struggles to his feet as soon as possible.

"Get up," Todoroki says urgently, seemingly on the same wavelength as Izuku. "He's still—"

But when they take a look at Stain, they find him lying motionless on the jagged ice.

Silence falls between them for a tense moment.

"Is... is he unconscious?" Iida asks cautiously.

“It ain’t over till it’s over,” Izuku says shakily, quoting Gran Torino’s words. “We should tie him up and strip him of his weapons. And we need to get you to a doctor, Iida.”

“We need to get *you* to a doctor too,” Todoroki returns reproachfully. He then stands up, a little wobbly but determined. “The paralysis has worn off. I’m the least hurt thanks to you two, so stand down while I do it.”

Izuku’s mind sluggishly runs through the possibilities—did the effect wear off now that Stain is unconscious? But no, Native is still paralyzed. Then does the number of people affect the result? Amount of blood consumed? Blood type?—as he wobbles a bit, the loss of adrenaline and blood leaving him exhausted. He is very carefully *not* looking at the broken blade that’s still sticking out of his calf.

Soon enough Native is also able to move and helps Todoroki, then they’re dragging a tied up Stain and leaving the alleyway.

“Careful now,” Native tells Izuku as he crouches in front of him with his back to Izuku.

“Sorry for the trouble,” Izuku says as he clambers onto the hero’s back. The man laughs shakily.

“Sorry? That’s what I should be saying. I’m a pro, and all I did was get in the way.”

“It would have happened to anyone in a one on one situation,” Izuku consoles him. Native hefts Izuku on his back easily and starts walking, Iida and Todoroki by his side with Todoroki dragging Stain.

“We only won because it was three on one and he made a mistake,” Todoroki continues Izuku’s line of thought. “He probably got too anxious to see through Midoriya’s trap. Then Iida’s Recipro Burst was too fast, and he couldn’t react to Midoriya.”

“He didn’t,” Izuku quietly corrects. He recalls seeing his own reflection clearly in Stain’s eyes. “He saw me, and he purposefully *didn’t* react. He *let* me hit him.”

Silence falls between the four of them as they ponder that fact.

And then they’re assaulted by a horde of heroes, led by none other than Gran Torino.

“Midoriya?!” The elderly hero sputters. “What are you doing here?!”

Then an entire gaggle of heroes follow.

“This is the alley… wait, is that the Hero Killer?!”

“Kids?”

“They’re badly hurt! Someone call the ambulance!”

“No wonder Endeavor told us to come here, not to mention that we’ve been getting calls from all over the country to head over…!”

Oh. It looks like some of his other classmates have clued in on Izuku’s distress call. He’s going to have to send a group message again to thank them and let them know they're safe now.

Native lets Izuku off his back to wait for the ambulance. The moment Izuku’s feet touch the ground Todoroki is beside him, silently offering his hand.

Izuku glances up at the other boy. Todoroki looks back steadily with his mismatched eyes. A small smile—thankful, playful, relieved—plays at Izuku’s mouth as he takes Todoroki’s hand. Todoroki takes their entwined hands carefully over his head so that he draws Izuku’s right arm over his shoulders, then snakes his left arm around Izuku’s waist in a gentle but firm hold.

“Keep your weight off that leg,” he tells Izuku. “Lean on me.”

“Mm,” Izuku agrees, just barely refraining from burrowing into Todoroki’s side. He hasn’t lost that much blood compared to Iida but he still feels a little cold, and the heat of Todoroki’s left side is almost heavenly.

They’re still going to have to pull out the blade embedded in his leg later, but for now, this is more than enough.

“You…”

The two turn to find Iida in a deep bow.

“Both of you were wounded because of me. I’m so sorry. I… was so… *blind.* You trusted me, Midoriya. And I let you down.”

Tears splatter on the ground.

“No,” Izuku says. “I’m sorry too. I promised I’d be there, but I couldn’t understand you, I was too late, and I even *hurt* you.”

Something bitter that tastes like regret and self-loathing wells up in the back of Izuku’s throat. He can't bring himself to look directly at the ugly mess of burns at Iida's throat. He only prays that the doctors will be able to fix it up properly, because if not...

“You weren’t late,” Iida’s voice breaks his thoughts. The boy lifts his head, his teary eyes drilling into Izuku’s. “I’m sorry for what I said. But Midoriya, it’s not true when I said I didn’t want you. You still came for me, and you saved me. You both did.”

Todoroki squeezes the arm around Izuku's waist as if to encourage him. Izuku smiles at his friends. He still feels slightly sick at the familiar smell of burnt flesh, but he won’t apologize anymore, and he won’t let Iida either. Izuku had been *terrified* for the lives of both his friends, but now they're all safe. That's what he focuses on.

He takes a deep, steadying breath, then nods decisively.

“...Thanks. Now, let's all stop apologizing. I’m alive. You’re alive. Todoroki’s alive. We’re good. Tomorrow, we’re going to wake up together and sneak out of the hospital to get ice cream. And it’s going to be a *great* day.”

He dares the world to say otherwise.

*

But life isn’t fair, and it certainly isn’t *kind.*

Just as all their problems seem to be solved, an urgent shout rings through the air.

“Get down!” Gran Torino yells.

Izuku whips his head around to find a Nomu with wings flying towards them.

His mind is in overdrive. The Nomu is missing an eye so its aim might be off, but considering the path...

Izuku shoves Todoroki away from him in the same moment the Nomu clasps a taloned foot around his waist. Then it takes off again to the air in a flash, far too high for even Gran Torino to reach.

"Midoriya!" Todoroki's desperate scream echoes after them.

The ground is a flurry of panicked movement when the Nomu suddenly shudders and starts falling to the ground with a screech.

Oh shit, Izuku thinks as he tries to brace himself for the fall, his body tired and sluggish even in the face of imminent death.

But before he can do anything, a dark shadow grabs him and finishes off the Nomu by embedding a familiar knife in it's exposed brain. The man hits the ground with a thud, but sets Izuku down almost gently.

"Both this sham-filled society... and criminals who just wield their power... are targets of my purge," Stain pants.

"All... for the sake... of a better society."

Even as Endeavor barrels into the scene, the Hero Killer doesn't back off. If anything, his vigour seems to only grow as he takes step after step towards the heroes.

"Fake," he spits with contempt at Endeavor. "Someone must fix it. Someone must bathe in blood, to reclaim the true meaning of 'hero'. Come, you fakes!"

Everyone is frozen as the sheer weight of Stain's conviction presses down on them, nausea clawing their stomachs, fear crawling down their spine, horror choking their throats, and despair rooting their feet.

Everyone, except Izuku.

Because you see, Izuku knows fear like the back of his hands. He's worn despair like the scars on his back. He's stood to face terror and horror time and time again.

While Izuku can't get used to the fear *for* someone else, he *is* used to the fear *of* someone. So when everyone—his friends, the pros, even Gran Torino and Endeavor—is frozen in the face of Stain's pure unadulterated wrath, Izuku isn't.

He does what he's always done.

He steps between them.

“The only one who can kill me is the *true* hero, All Might!” Stain shouts.

But before he can take another step closer to the heroes, Izuku *pulls* himself in front of the villain. He can’t run and the tip of the blade still piercing his leg scrapes the concrete ground as he skids with his pull, but Izuku pays it no mind as he pivots to position himself between the Hero Killer and everyone else.

He faces the Hero Killer in a defensive crouch. He flings both his arms to either side to shield everyone else and his fire subconsciously bursts out of his back like a pair of wings, flaring out to shroud the others from Stain’s sight.

Stain pauses. His unfocused eyes stare directly at Izuku, and his deformed face breaks into a mad, mad grin.

“And you.”

*

“...Is something on your mind? Are you bothered by what the police said?”

Izuku jolts out of his thoughts as Todoroki sits down on his hospital bed.

It’s the day after they met Stain, and Izuku, Todoroki, and Iida have been piled into the same hospital room. Hosu’s Chief of Police had come in earlier and made a deal with the three, saying that they won’t be punished for acting without a hero licence if they agree to keep their mouths shut and let Endeavor take the credit of catching Stain. Todoroki had initially raged against his accusing words, but eventually it had turned out alright.

Right now the adults have left and Iida has gone out for the moment to get treatment on his left arm and his throat, so it’s only the two of them in the hospital room.

“No,” Izuku reassures him. “It’s just... I’ve been thinking about what

Stain said."

Todoroki raises his eyebrows. "He said a lot of things. Most of which were bullshit and you shouldn't let bother you."

Izuku startles at his uncharacteristic swearing, then huffs out a breath of laughter. But he still doesn't open his mouth.

Todoroki's eyes soften.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," he says, but Izuku shakes his head.

"No, it's just... I don't want to dump my baggage on you."

Todoroki snorts.

"Isn't that exactly what I did to you at the Sports Festival? I'd say you're entitled."

Izuku grins back. "Fair enough."

He still doesn't say anything for a while. Instead of rushing him, Todoroki shifts so that his thigh is pressing against Izuku's in a comforting gesture.

Izuku takes in a breath at Todoroki's wordless support and steels himself.

"Remember... remember how Stain said that I don't understand revenge?"

Todoroki stills.

Izuku recalls how earlier, when Iida had apologized to Maunal, the hero had given him an exasperated but fond smile with the words *"I understand how you must have felt, but don't do it again."*

Even Manual, who had known Iida for barely *three days,* had understood Iida better than Izuku, who is supposed to be his friend.

"I don't," Izuku says bitterly. "He's right and I *don't* understand it. But he's wrong that it's because I'm selfless. It's because I'm *weak."*

Life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind.

And just like it hasn't been to Izuku, life hasn't been fair or kind to

Iida or Todoroki either.

Stain had hurt someone Iida cares for. Iida Tenya's older brother Tensei had been his *hero.* And Stain took that away from them both. So Iida swore revenge and stalked the streets of Hosu for a chance to kill the Hero Killer himself.

Endeavor hurt Todoroki first, but it was probably the fact that he hurt his mother that made him snap. Todoroki's mother was the one person he could turn to, and Endeavor made her push Todoroki away and later even ripped them apart from each other. So Todoroki swore revenge and refused to use the fire part of his quirk to rub it in Endeavor's face.

Hisashi hurt Inko. *So much.* And when Izuku interfered, he hurt Izuku even *more.*

But the thing is, all Izuku had ever wanted was for Hisashi to stop. He had never thought about revenge— not when Hisashi beat Inko, not when he switched to beat Izuku, not even after he got arrested. The thought of retaliation or vengeance had never once even crossed Izuku's mind.

To Izuku, Hisashi was like a force of nature. A natural disaster. If a tornado wrecks your home, you don't shake your fist and try to get back at it. You just weather it and bear it as best you can while you wait for it to pass, then pick up the pieces once it's left.

And being too used to Hisashi, even with Bakugo... hell, even with *Shigaraki* Izuku had never felt anything approaching being truly *vindictive.* Seeing the villain order Nomu to break Aizawa had made him *snap,* but even then Izuku had avoided directly aiming his fire at Shigaraki.

So, Stain is right. Izuku has never felt vengeance. He doesn't *understand* it.

That disconnect is why Izuku hadn't been able to follow Iida's thought process. It's why he hadn't been able to immediately guess where Iida might be and look for him right away. It's why he was *too late* to save him.

Horror had filled Izuku at this realization. Not only had he been too weak to save his mother, but because of this weakness, he couldn't save Iida either.

His hands shake as he bites the bottom of his lip.

“I never,” his voice breaks. “I never *once* thought about fighting against my father. Stepping between him and my mother, yes. Standing up to him, yes. But not fighting him, and certainly not taking revenge on him. Stain said that’s because I’m too selfless, but no. It’s because I’m too weak to even *think* of opposing my father.”

Izuku’s hands crumple his sheets even as they tremble.

“I always knew that I was too weak, that I was never enough, but this… this just *proves* it.”

A shudder goes through him as a cruel laugh rings in his ears and a touch ghosts across his scars.

But the cold phantom is banished when Todoroki clasps his hands gently but firmly over both of Izuku’s clenched fists, leaning over Izuku so that their foreheads are almost touching and Izuku is forced to meet his eyes.

“No,” he counters firmly. “You’re right about a lot of things, but not on this. You didn’t think of revenge because you’re the type of person that thinks about saving people, not harming them. Take it from someone who’s been consumed by revenge. You are not weak. You are *kind.* And you,” Todoroki’s voice almost breaks as it turns into a whisper. “You were *more* than I deserved.”

Izuku looks back at Todoroki with wide eyes. There’s fiery compassion and ice hard conviction in those mismatched eyes, and Izuku feels his fists ease despite himself.

“That reminds me,” Todoroki says, a small crease forming in between his brows. “I know it’s who you are, but don’t do that again.”

“Do what?” Izuku repeats almost dazedly at the seemingly sudden turn of conversation.

“Push me away,” Todoroki clarifies. “Put yourself in harm for me. You made those knives fly to you instead and you pushed me away when that Nomu came for you. Then to top it all off, you stepped between us when Stain got up again. Don’t do that.”

Todoroki squeezes Izuku’s hands hard as if to say *I mean it,* though his hold is firm without ever nearing the point of being painful. And while his tone is gentle, there’s a spark of hardness in Todoroki’s

voice. Something burns in his mismatched eyes, and Izuku watches mesmerized for a moment before he snorts.

“What?”

“It’s just,” Izuku chuckles. “I have this theory, see, that a person’s quirk and personality reflect each other. And you always seem so cool, but in moments like this, or when you shouted at the *head of police who has the head of a dog,* you remind me that even if half of you is ice, the other half of you is fire.”

“Huh,” Todoroki says, and now his eyes are softer, the corners of his lips drawing up in that way that's almost imperceptible to others but somehow clear as day to Izuku. “Well, if that’s the case, then it would explain a lot. It’s obvious what kind of person you are, after all.”

“Me?” Izuku blinks incredulously.

“You,” Todoroki confirms with a small nod and a smile playing at his lips. He taps a finger against the back of Izuku's hand as he counts off his quirks.

“Selective gravity, fire, and super strength.”

Todoroki looks straight into Izuku’s eyes.

“You’re a star.”

There’s something decided and absolute in the way Todoroki says those words, an unshaken conviction that takes Izuku’s breath away. After all this time cursing his own quirk, Todoroki is saying that all the parts that Izuku has make him into something that is as *brilliant* as a *star.* That’s just... that’s...

“And that’s not all,” Todoroki continues. “Everyone can’t help but be drawn to you and orbit around you. And stars like that...”

Izuku’s breath catches as he clues in to what Todoroki means.

He recalls all the dreams he’d had of burning his wings for daring to have reached for the sun.

But.

The corners of Todoroki’s eyes soften as he smiles at Izuku and whispers words that sound like *hope.*

“We call them *suns.*”

+ Omake +

“Oh my god,” Izuku groans in exasperation. “Do we have to?”

“You’re the one who said we’re going to sneak out of the hospital and get ice cream,” Iida points out reasonably.

“Yes, but do we have to do that with me hanging off Todoroki’s back like a koala?”

“You’re leg is still too wounded to walk. My arms are too wounded to hold you up. So Todoroki giving you a piggyback ride is the only logical option,” Iida points out, again. Reasonably, again.

“Don’t worry,” Todoroki quips with a straight face. “I won’t let you down.”

“Oh my god, not you too,” Izuku almost moans at the repeated joke, even as he obediently climbs onto Todoroki’s back.

Due to his position, he isn't able to see the conspiring grins shared between Todoroki and Iida.

The next day, their escapade makes the news. The photo in the papers shows Izuku piggybacked on Todoroki’s back, an ice cream cone in each hand. He’s holding the vanilla flavoured cone to his own mouth and the other to Todoroki’s. Todoroki's eyes are slightly crossed from trying to look at the treat Izuku is holding in his face, valiantly trying to lick the mint chocolate flavoured ice cream that’s two centimetres too far away even as he carries Izuku with ease. Iida is gesturing enthusiastically while holding up his own strawberry ice cream like a torch.

All three of them are covered in bandages, casts, and gauze.

But all three of them are smiling happily.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku: I do *not* look like a bunny!
Todo: Yes you do.
Iida: Yes you do.
Stain: Yes you do.
Izuku:
Me: *Izuku headbang*

Also, I totally believe the quirk/personality theory.

There are a few scenes/lines that I've always looked forward to writing. Some of them include Izuku first using his fire to save his hero (pushing back for the first time), DadMight and the swapping of stuffed bunnies/pomeranians, You're next/We're next, Izuku's fire wings, the TodoDeku fight in general, both BakuDeku fights, and more. There were several of these long awaited lines/scenes in this chapter alone, which were:
1. [MIDORIYA IZUKU: SUPER STRENGTH AND FIRE... THE SECRET LOVE CHILD OF ALL MIGHT AND ENDEAVOR?]
2. Todo making his temporary hero name "Shouto" just because Izuku won't call him that. That's it. That's my headcanon, and now BYW canon.
3. "You don't understand revenge"
4. "The only one who can kill me is the true hero, All Might... and you."
5. "Tomorrow, we're going to wake up together and sneak out of the hospital to get ice cream. And it's going to be a *great* day." He dares the world to say otherwise.
6. "You're a star. And some stars... we call them suns."

The Calm Before the Storm

Chapter Summary

Some more five star (he heh, STAR) fanart!!

"We call them suns" scene by apassingwolf: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/178793858374/youre-a-star-and-some-stars-we-call-them
The TodoDeku fight by kiwi-sodapop: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/177560004084/kiwi-sodapop-this-shits-breathtaking-bro
The Great Ice Cream Escapade by eclypse-it: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/177210235294/eclypse-it-ah-this-is-super-sloppy-but

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They're grounded.

(It's a novel experience for Izuku, who's never been grounded in his life— beaten by his father until he thought he might die then and there, check; locked in the broom cupboard for his own good by his mother, check; kept at home by a controlling father-slash-upcoming-villain, check; but never *grounded.)* (And while a part of him is ashamed, the other—larger, if he's being honest—part of him is more fascinated by the concept and being at the receiving end of something that's such a *normal* teenager thing.)

So. They're grounded. Or at least, as grounded as they can be when they're already confined to their hospital room, but their supervisors had been very clear and adamant this time: no more ice cream escapades.

On one hand, Izuku understands their concern. The public is in disarray with the news and fanmade videos about Stain going viral despite the police's best efforts to contain it. Since the three of them are trying to hide the extent of their involvement with the villain, it only makes sense to keep their heads down. And considering Izuku, Todoroki, and Iida are all decked in hospital gowns and in various stages of mummification, not to mention all three of them have had significant screen time on national television thanks to the Sports

Festival, they're not exactly inconspicuous wandering around ice cream stalls.

But on the other hand, although Izuku had been the one to propose the break out in the first place, if even *Todoroki* and *Iida* (the stiffest of them all when it comes to rules) went through with it without a single complaint, Izuku would say it was *totally justified* (and *totally worth it*).

Nevertheless, the three of them are all piled together and kept in the same hospital room. Which actually isn't that bad. After having been terrified that he was going to see both Todoroki and Iida die in front of him, it's soothing and reassuring to be able to have them constantly within sight.

And besides, Izuku has been texting and calling their other classmates to let them know that they're fine and to thank them for responding so quickly to his distress signal, so it's not like they're completely cut off from everyone. Really, being grounded feels more like a glorified sleep over at this point. (Not that he has any experience in that either, but he's imagined what it might feel like. So far, these few days have been living up to and surpassing his fantasies.)

Izuku hobbles back on his crutches into their hospital room after ending his call with Uraraka. Todoroki, as perceptive and effortlessly attuned to Izuku as ever, raises his eyebrows when he sees Izuku's expression.

"What's wrong? Weren't you talking with Uraraka?"

Izuku groans.

"I was. It turns out she saw the news clip of our ice cream break out, and her teasing was *merciless*. I think she used the 'I won't let you down' joke at least five times in the last ten sentences."

Iida snorts and Todoroki grins slightly, his expression a small tugging on the corners of his lips that lights up his mismatched eyes.

"It's not funny, *you* try being paraded around like a trophy on live television," Izuku grumbles, only for his friends' smiles to grow wider. Soon he too gives in and smiles back at them. "Yeah, fine, alright. So, anything come up while I was gone?"

At that, Todoroki and Iida share a look.

"...Iida's diagnosis came out," Todoroki begins cautiously.

Izuku's heart misses a beat.

"No no no, I'm fine!" Iida reassures quickly at the look on Izuku's face, gesturing frantically as if to prove his wellbeing. "And I have you to thank for that! The doctor said I probably wouldn't have made it alive without you. You immediately put pressure on the wound, so I didn't bleed out and didn't even lose that much blood in the first place. And apparently cauterizing with naked fire has a much smaller chance of infection than sealing a wound with a heated blade or something, although only people with fire quirks can do it. So. Thank you again."

Iida's eyes soften.

"I told you you would be saving me... saving all of us."

And while there's no blame in Iida's eyes, Izuku feels faintly sick because despite Iida's kind words all he can think is 'none of us would have had to go through that if only I hadn't been *too late* to save you in the first place.' Because despite Iida's assurances, Izuku knows *exactly* how dangerous and painful cauterizing a wound is.

But they promised each other not to apologize anymore, so Izuku swallows hard and bites back his words.

"And how are your arms?" he asks instead, gesturing at both of Iida's bandaged arms hanging in slings.

"Both of them were severely injured but... it looks like my left hand could have permanent damage," Iida admits.

Izuku's breath catches. He recalls how Stain had pinned Iida to the ground by driving a katana through his left arm, like pinning a butterfly. He recalls how Iida had shielded Todoroki from Stain's knives by catching them in his own arm instead.

"Something called the brachial plexus nerve was severed. And while they say I might regain most of the feeling and use of my fingers if I get a nerve transplant, I... I don't think I will. Not yet, at least."

Iida looks down at his hand.

"When I found the Hero Killer, my mind went blank. But I should never have acted as I did, especially when I'd just promised not to let you down, Midoriya. And I may hate what he did, but the things he said weren't wrong. So until I become a true hero... my left hand will serve as a reminder."

Izuku leans heavily on his crutch at Iida's statement. As much as he's horrified that his friend had not escaped unscathed, there's a calm acceptance in Iida's words. He can't disrespect that by apologizing or thinking of what-ifs.

So instead, he stretches out his own scarred and disfigured right hand, curling it into a fist.

"I understand, Iida. So... let's do better, together."

Iida smiles at him, bumping Izuku's right fist with his own bandaged left hand.

"We'll *be* better, together," he promises back.

Their shared moment is broken by a strangled cough. Izuku and Iida turn their heads to find Todoroki staring down at his own unmarred hand in a cold sweat.

"I'm... sorry..."

Izuku blinks.

"For what? I thought we agreed we weren't allowed to apologize and blame ourselves anymore."

"No, it's just that... every time I get involved, it feels like... someone's hand gets messed up..."

Todoroki looks up at them with a lost expression.

"Is this a curse?"

Izuku chokes. Iida stares. Then they both burst out laughing.

"Oh my god," Izuku gasps, letting his crutch clatter to the ground and falling onto Todoroki's bed.

"It seems even you know how to make a joke, Todoroki!" Iida guffaws, glasses knocked askew with how hard he's laughing.

Todoroki looks between them, nonplussed.

"No, I'm not joking. I feel like I should be named the 'Hand Crusher' or something..."

"Hand Crusher!"

“Oh my god, stop, you’re making my stitches burst!”

Iida doubles over while Izuku practically rolls around in Todoroki’s bed, both clutching their sides.

The funniest part is that Izuku *knows* Todoroki is 100% serious.

*

Their laughter has faded away somewhat—Iida and Todoroki sitting on their respective beds while Midoriya is flopped on Todoroki’s, not even having been able to make it to his own bed—when Midoriya opens his mouth again.

“Iida. What about… what about the scars on your throat?” he asks in a small voice.

Iida straightens up to find that Midoriya is lying with part of his body on Todoroki’s bed, half dangling there with his eyes on the ceiling. Refusing to meet Iida’s eyes.

He touches the thick swathe of gauze and bandages on his throat.

“It doesn’t affect my breathing or anything, and they say we got to the hospital soon enough that they can lessen the scarring if I want to. Although…” Iida plans to leave it as it is, just like his hand.

He’s not the kind of person who revels in battle scars and thinks they make him more manly or whatever, but he’s not ashamed of the proof that his friend saved his life. He’s about to say as much when he catches Todoroki looking at him with meaningful eyes.

The other boy subtly shakes his head. Midoriya is still carefully keeping his gaze fixed on the ceiling, so he can’t see the way Todoroki is silently signalling to Iida.

‘Do it,’ the other boy mouthes slowly and clearly. ‘For him.’

Iida hesitates, wavers, then decides to trust Todoroki on this. Because while Iida’s still the slightest bit jealous of how quickly and easily Todoroki just *clicked* with Midoriya (Iida was Midoriya’s friend *first,* and Midoriya had been Iida’s first real friend) he also feels ashamed of those thoughts. (Later, he will realize that Midoriya may be *Todoroki’s*

first friend too.) And after facing Stain together, Iida finds himself losing the slight bitterness he'd secretly held. Besides, he can't deny that there's something *more* between Midoriya and Todoroki, an understanding that transcends the short time they've been together.

So, Iida will trust Todoroki on this. Like he said, for Midoriya.

"—Well. Um. Yes. I can... I will lessen the scarring."

It's only at those words that Midoriya finally shifts his gaze from the ceiling to look at Iida. Iida watches as his friend's face blossoms in relief. He catches Todoroki looking at Midoriya with sad, sad eyes.

*

Shouto doesn't know everything about Midoriya's past. But he knows enough to be sure that Midoriya would never want anyone to bear burn scars, especially ones made by himself. Even if Iida won't mind them, Shouto knows they will plague Midoriya.

If Iida tells him that he wants to keep the burns, Midoriya probably won't try to persuade Iida otherwise regardless of how much it'll hurt him to look upon the scars.

Because that's what Iida wants.

So Shouto will speak up for him.

Because that's what Midoriya *needs.*

*

Later that night, Izuku sighs as he gets ready for bed. He reaches up and takes the multiple bobby pins out of his bun, shaking his head to let his curls tumble freely into his face.

He turns at the feeling of being watched to find Todoroki staring at him.

“What?” he asks.

Todoroki blinks slowly.

“It’s just,” he says, not taking his eyes off Izuku. “I’m not used to seeing you with your hair down.”

Izuku freezes. Last night they’d turned off the lights almost immediately after getting ready for bed, too worn out by the thorough chewing out their various supervisors and hospital staff had delivered for the breakout. But Iida has a book propped open for some light bedtime reading, the lights are still on, and Izuku had felt so comfortable with the two of them that he hadn’t thought when he’d put down his hair in plain sight.

He recalls the reason he started putting his hair up in the first place all those years ago. He had mimicked his mother’s hairstyle in an effort to look less like his father. But now he has his hair down, and—

“You look like—“

—his *father*—

“—a bunny with droopy ears.”

...Wait. What?

“What?” Izuku croaks out loud.

Iida jumps up from his bed with his phone in his hand.

“Oh! I know exactly what you mean!” he says excitedly, tapping on his phone then showing it proudly to Todoroki. Todoroki nods approvingly at whatever Iida is showing him on the screen, then beckons Izuku over.

Izuku isn’t sure if he wants to know, but he warily approaches the two anyways.

The image on Iida’s screen is that of a fluffy lop-eared rabbit, its ears characteristically drooping down on either side of its face. It is admittedly adorable, but—

“—I do *not* look like a bunny,” Izuku seethes.

Todoroki and Iida both give him a look that’s eerily identical.

“Yes you do,” they say in synchronization.

Iida shakes his head at Izuku’s affronted squawk and just gets up to climb back into his own bed. Todoroki pats Izuku’s hand in a placating ‘there-there’ gesture but tellingly doesn’t take back his words.

Izuku huffs at his friends, though admittedly more in fond amusement than actual annoyance.

Suddenly, Todoroki’s hand jerks into stillness. Izuku raises his head to find the other boy staring down at Izuku’s right hand. The one that’s been scarred and deformed from their fight during the Sports Festival.

“It... was still bandaged until we left for our internships,” Todoroki says quietly, never taking his eyes off Izuku’s hand. “I never got to see it up close after... the surgery...”

He swallows, then bites out the words haltingly, his fingers hovering over Izuku’s right hand as if he desperately wants to touch but is also afraid to do so.

“Can... Can I... would it... I...”

And somehow, Izuku *understands.*

Without another word, he sits down next to Todoroki on the bed and places his scarred hand in Todoroki’s waiting palm.

Todoroki clasps Izuku’s hand in both of his with a sort of desperation. He traces the furrowed scars with an aching gentleness, like he’s afraid he might be hurting Izuku. He skims the deformed bones of Izuku’s fingers with almost painstaking care, his own fingertips featherlight and trembling just the tiniest bit.

There’s a certain weight in his movements, a tightness in his face.

“It’s not your fault,” Izuku breaks the silence, guessing too easily where Todoroki’s thoughts must be. After all, he’s had the exact same thoughts when looking at Iida’s scars. “And besides, I don’t care about getting more scars.”

“I do,” Todoroki almost whispers, so quiet that only Izuku can hear. “I never wanted you to get even more scars. Especially because of me.”

Ah. Of course. Todoroki is the only one who has ever seen the extent

of Izuku's scars; it makes sense that he'd be more sensitive about it than someone who doesn't know.

"Hey," Izuku jostles him, purposefully light and playful. "We've already talked about this. If I don't get to blame myself for Iida's burns, then you don't get to blame yourself for my hand, either."

"Even if the 'Hand Crusher' would be a *delightful* moniker," Iida adds from his bed.

"...Alright," Todoroki finally concedes, although he doesn't let go of Izuku's hand. If anything, he seems to have lost some of his hesitation and starts exploring Izuku's hand in earnest now.

Todoroki plays with Izuku's hand, tracing the furrowed scars, aligning his fingers with Izuku's, pressing lightly between his knuckles, and gently rubbing the deformed bones. It... almost feels like a cat kneading.

Izuku almost snorts at the mental image of a large, affectionate, white and red cat kneading his hand.

"Um. Are you... going to keep playing with my hand...?"

Todoroki blinks at Izuku owlishly.

"Should I stop? Does it hurt?"

"No, it's just that..."

Isn't this weird?

Izuku bites his tongue. Todoroki honestly doesn't seem to find it strange at all. But then again this is the person who threw down the metaphorical gauntlet to Izuku out of the blue, not even caring that their entire class was watching. He probably doesn't have the best idea of social norms.

But Iida seems to be fine as well, not even batting an eye at the fact that Todoroki is going full cat-mode on Izuku and hogging his hand.

Izuku isn't sure if he's surrounded himself with socially inept friends, or if he's actually the socially inept one.

...Well, he was telling Todoroki the truth when he said it doesn't hurt. It actually feels kinda nice, now that he's a little more used to it and has gotten over the initial weirdness. And if Todoroki wants to do it to

soothe his own mind, then who is Izuku to deny him that?

“Never mind,” he eventually capitulates, giving up his right to his own hand. “Carry on.”

*

Aizawa sits down heavily on the couch of the teacher’s break room. He rubs the corner of his forehead with one newly unbandaged hand while he holds his phone up to his ear with the other.

“...So that’s pretty much it for what happened in Hosu,” finishes the voice on the other end of the line. “You’ll get a full report later on, but we’re letting you know the basics right now since you’re in charge of all three of the kids.”

Damn right he is, and he still hadn’t been able to do anything when three of his students had been facing the *Hero Killer*. He had thought things would be different since the USJ, but he’s failed them once again.

But Aizawa reins in his frustration and politely greets the police officer on the line.

“Thanks for letting me know. I’ll keep quiet about their involvement.”

The officer hums, but instead of hanging up he muses almost as if to himself.

“You’ve got a good batch of hero aspirants this year. It’s a pity we can’t announce what they did for society... And especially the first responder. Midoriya, was it? The one who won the Sports Festival? Kid’s got his head screwed right. Looks like he purposefully tried to get Stain talking to fish for information while simultaneously stalling for time.”

Aizawa bites back a groan.

Of course it was Midoriya. *Of course* it was his problem child.

Not that he did the wrong thing—on the contrary, any morsel of information he managed to pry out probably helped the follow-up investigation immensely—but Aizawa remembers how flippant and

lacking self-preservation Midoriya had been at the USJ. He can only imagine what he could have said to Stain.

“He even got the Hero Killer to talk a little about the League of Villains. Oh, and apparently—”

Aizawa’s brain short-circuits when he hears what the officer says.

“What,” Aizawa finally manages flatly. The police officer repeats himself. Aizawa can’t bring himself to believe what he’s just heard but at the same time instinctively knows it’s true because it’s just *so Midoriya.*

His problem child is going to give him premature gray hairs.

He’s still staring blankly at his phone five minutes later when All Might enters the room, probably hoping to find a private place to make his own call. The man stops when he sees Aizawa’s face.

“What happened?” he asks worriedly.

Aizawa has no idea where to even *start,* but what finally makes out of his mouth is a flat “Apparently Shigaraki has a photo of Midoriya and is showing it off to serial killers like a school girl with a crush.”

All Might chokes.

“What.”

Aizawa scrubs his hands over his face.

“Yeah. My sentiments exactly.”

*

When Izuku steps into the classroom after the internship is over, he’s met with a whoop.

“He lives!” Ashido cheers while Sero and Sato jump up and pat Izuku down comically as if to check that he’s actually here. Izuku laughs, reminded of the morning after the USJ incident.

Kirishima grins toothily and shows Izuku the screen on his phone.

“You’re trending. That video on Stain went viral, which means *you* went viral—” he waves his phone in front of Izuku’s eyes as if to emphasize, and Izuku catches a glimpse of threads titled ‘Return of the fiery angel’ ‘Stain seal of approval: All Might and Midoriya’ ‘so how about that stain vid huh (feat.midoriya)’.

Izuku groans, covering his face with his hands.

“Don’t remind me. People are staring even *more* now,” he almost whimpers. Because while having the public’s eye on you is expected and even necessary to be a hero in this age, Izuku tended to think more about the actual saving people part and not the publicity part. He’s totally fine being a fanboy of heroes, but he’s *so not ready* for there to be fans of *him.*

While he’s grateful for all the support, and being well known will probably help further his goal to become the No. 1 hero, Izuku still isn’t used to being showered with this much positive attention and the Stain video only upped the number of eyes turning towards him. *(Thanks,* Stain.)

“But come on, it’s kinda cool!” Kaminari gushes from his seat. “I mean, sure Stain is scary, but that video you’re in was legit. You can really see his tenacity and one track mind. Can’t help but admire that kind of conviction, you know?”

“Kaminari,” Izuku cuts in sharply before glancing towards the back of the classroom. Iida is standing by Todoroki’s seat, probably drawn together by the familiarity that had grown between the three of them over the last few days. Izuku joins them, standing by Iida’s side in silent support.

Kaminari’s eyes follow Izuku confusedly before widening when they land on Iida.

“Oh shit, I’m sorry Iida!” he says anxiously while slapping a hand over his mouth.

But Iida calmly looks down at his newly scarred left hand.

“No... it’s fine. He certainly was a man of conviction. I understand if some people admire him. But his convictions were executed in the wrong way. No matter the motive, it is simply wrong to kill as he did. So I will walk the path of a true hero so that others like myself shall not emerge!” Iida’s voice rises in fervour and volume as he goes on, eventually concluding exuberantly while gesturing dramatically with

his hand.

Izuku watches in awe.

Todoroki looked past Endeavor's abuse and acknowledged his status as the No. 2 hero.

Iida looked past Stain's crimes and acknowledged his conviction.

They're both so strong.

"Hmp. Shut the fuck up, you losers," a voice grouses and breaks the moment. Izuku follows the sound of the voice to find a familiar face but an unfamiliar silhouette.

He chokes.

"Kacchan?!" Izuku sputters.

Bakugo's shoulders rise up to his ears defensively. Sero and Kirishima burst out into peals of laughter, tears in their eyes, effectively breaking the heavy atmosphere. They don't even seem to care that Bakugo is glaring death at them.

Bakugo, whose notoriously spiky hair has been smoothed down and parted in a perfect 2:8 ratio.

"Oh my god," Izuku says faintly.

"Not a word, Deku," Bakugo grits out.

"But Kacchan—"

"Not. A. *Word."*

Izuku stares in awe and obediently closes his mouth.

Instead, he lifts up his phone and snaps a photo.

Snap.

Bakugo stands there in frozen disbelief for a moment while Izuku rapidly taps away on his phone. Then the blonde explodes.

"The FUCK did you just do?! Wait, no, the fuck *are* you doing right now?!"

“I’m sending the photo to Mitsuki-san. I’m sure she’ll appreciate it,” Izuku replies.

Bakugo flips at the mention of his mother, his hair exploding with a *boom* back to its usual spikes. He lunges for Izuku with a snarl.

“Don’t you dare, you shitty nerd, do you know how much effort it took to sneak in the house to make sure the hag wouldn’t see me like this?!”

“Exactly!” Izuku gasps in laughter as he dodges Bakugo’s hands that are grabbing for his phone. Todoroki helpfully raises one leg and trips Bakugo. “Mitsuki-san will have a field day, she’ll use this as an excuse to go out for celebratory dessert with my mom for *weeks—”*

“She’ll laugh hysterically and print out a photo to frame it and hang it in the living room just to torture me, that’s what’ll happen—”

“Do you know how to contact Best Jeanist? I need to send him a fruit basket or something—”

“FUCK YOU DEKU!!”

Their classmates laugh and cheer them on as Bakugo chases Izuku around the classroom, people chipping in to make Bakugo stumble here and there so that Izuku can finish sending the text to his mother. Their chase ends when Aizawa comes in for homeroom and binds them both with his capture weapon. (And Izuku totally didn’t have a fanboy moment at actually experiencing that. Nope.)

His good mood lasts him through the Basic Hero Training class All Might teaches as he almost flies over the industrial obstacle course of Field Gamma.

Izuku’s *pull* has always given him mobility, and the use of his *push* has given him stability. And now with Full cowl letting him pull off fine-turned manoeuvres, not even Sero has a chance at beating him in this field.

Izuku whoops as takes a running leap off a crane with Full Cowl powering his jump, pulling himself across a chasm while adjusting his course with a burst of fire so that he lands on a thick pipe. And then he’s off again, part running, part jumping, part *flying.*

His exhilaration dims a bit when All Might pulls up to him discreetly, though.

“Incredible!” All Might whispers as he’s passing, giving Izuku a secret thumbs up. “Meet me at the beach after school. There are matters we must discuss about One For All.”

And though All Might is smiling proudly, Izuku knows the hero well enough to catch the pensive unease underneath.

That... does not bode well.

*

Toshinori sits on a flight of stairs overlooking the beach that has become *their* beach.

He considered calling Midoriya to one of the private break rooms in the school like when they had the conversation before the Sports Festival, but, well, look how well *that* ended up. (With spilt blood and broken bones and fresh scars that *Toshinori* was responsible for.) Thankfully the beach is open enough that they can spot anyone approaching, so they won’t need to worry about eavesdroppers. And Toshinori is going to need every ounce of comfort and courage he can get if he’s going to talk about One For All, so. Dagoba Beach it is.

He starts a little when young Midoriya seems to suddenly materialize and take a seat beside him. He keeps forgetting how quietly the boy can move, but he brushes away his surprise and smiles at the boy.

“You said you wanted to talk about One For All,” Midoriya begins first, voice low enough that it won’t carry far over the sound of the crashing waves. “I thought about what this might be about, and... Stain didn’t ingest any of my blood, if that’s what you’re concerned about.”

Toshinori blinks. Then he shakes his head and chuckles.

Of course that’s what his boy is worried about.

“Rest assured, my boy; even if someone ingests your DNA, they won’t receive One For All unless you *want* them to. This is a quirk that can be forcefully given, but not forcefully taken.”

“Oh,” Midoriya says, looking relieved but also confused. “Then... what

was it you wanted to talk about?"

Toshinori feels as if his skeletal form deflates even more at Midoriya's question. He braces his elbows on his knees and clasps his hands, his limp bangs shadowing his eyes. He stays in that position for a moment before he steels himself.

"I... have failed you," the hero starts quietly. "When I passed on One For All to you, I thought I was passing on my status as the No. 1 hero and the beacon of hope." And even that had made his heart clench in worry. But... "...But it seems I have also passed on the ultimate evil."

He takes a deep breath.

"It is time I tell you the origin of One For All: the story of All For One."

Toshinori tells him.

He tells Midoriya about the advent of the era of quirks, about the chaos and the man who tried to rule over it with manipulation, fear, and power. He tells him about the brother who tried to stop that man, about his failure, about the melding of quirks that birthed One For All. He tells him about how each wielder of One For All stood against All For One, generation after generation, until the eighth holder, Toshinori himself, vanquished him for good— or so he had thought.

He tells him about his suspicions of how the Nomus were made. He tells him about how the influence of the Stain and the League of Villains incident has All For One's fingerprints all over it.

He tells him that now, that ultimate evil, that whispered legend, that horrid bedtime scare... is Midoriya's responsibility as the next wielder of One For All.

Toshinori hangs his head. It was bad enough realizing the full weight of passing on his position as the No. 1 hero. But Toshinori had *never* planned to also pass on the crushing burden of facing All For One as well. Not even before he came to truly love his boy as something like the son he'll never have, and especially not now that he *does.* All For One was supposed to be *his* responsibility. He should have ended the cycle so that the vile man could never set his sight on his boy.

But Toshinori is physically unable to keep his boy safe. He still has a bit of One For All left in him, but in truth, he's running on fumes.

"...It should have ended with me," he finds himself saying bitterly. "All my predecessors, including my own mentor, were killed by All For One. You should have never have to face that monster. I... have failed you."

His words are cut short when a gentle hand places itself on Toshinori's own. He realizes with a start that his hands are white-knuckled, fingers digging into his knees. Toshinori forces his hands to relax under Midoriya's, which is dwarfed by his even in his skeletal form.

"You could never fail me," Midoriya says quietly, and Toshinori finds himself raising his head to look at his boy. He lifts his gaze to find green eyes that are infinitely warm but iron hard with conviction and promise. "Don't worry. I will break the cycle. All For One will never kill another wielder of One For All again."

I will break the cycle, his boy said.

But Toshinori knows Midoriya well enough to recognize that what he really means is *I will protect you.*

It takes Toshinori's breath away.

His heart melts a little because this is the second time Midoriya vowed to protect him—him! The No. 1 hero, the symbol of peace!—and no one has ever done that since Nana.

"...My mentor would have loved you," he finally says with a genuine smile.

Midoriya blinks.

"Gran Torino mentioned that he trained you in her stead," he begins cautiously, probably gauging Toshinori's reaction and not wanting to overstep. Toshinori smiles to show him it's alright. Seemingly encouraged, Midoriya swallows before forging on. "...Can I ask about her?"

Toshinori hums, turning his head to watch the rays of the setting sun dyeing the ocean in tendrils of rose and gold.

"...Her name was Shimura Nana. Regrettably, I did not get much time with her, but I still learned so much from her. She was the one who gave me, a quirkless child, a way to become a hero. She was the one who taught me to always smile. She was my hero."

A respectful silence follows his words.

Toshinori had noticed Midoriya starting in surprise when he mentioned he was quirkless, so when the boy opens his mouth Toshinori thinks maybe he might comment and ask about that. But instead what comes out is—

“I’m sorry we didn’t get to meet. She sounds like a wonderful person.”

And that right there, those words that are infinitely considerate and sincere while not prying or being overbearing, is part of why Toshinori loves this child so much.

“She was,” Toshinori agrees, smiling at his boy. “You actually remind me of her quite a bit.”

Midoriya’s eyes widen. “Me?!” he almost squeaks.

Toshinori nods solemnly.

“Like your hairstyle, for example.”

A long silence follows his grave statement.

“My... hairstyle,” Midoriya repeats, giving Toshinori a *look*.

And he can’t hold it anymore. Toshinori bursts out laughing, dropping his solemn expression.

Granted, even with the similar half-bun, Nana’s hair had been more sleek where Midoriya’s hair is a mess of fluffy curls, but that look was so *worth it*.

For the longest time, even thinking of his mentor’s memory had elicited only guilt and sadness. But it feels so good and so *right* to be able to make jokes and laugh in her memory with his own mentee.

Nana would have approved.

Toshinori grins at the flat look Midoriya levels at him.

“And also your courage. Your selflessness. Your kindness. Your strength. Your resolve. Your warmth. Your brightness. And the way you smile, no matter what.”

He smiles softly at the awed and humbled expression Midoriya is now wearing.

“I have always tried to be even half the hero she was. But you are already so much like her.”

(And unknown to Toshinori, Izuku’s first instinct is to deny it. Because he has always tried to *not* be like his father, but he still knew that he was tethered to Hisashi—*like father, like son*—and there’s no way someone like him can be like someone who’s so great, there’s no way he can be like the *hero* of his *hero.*) (But he also knows what it feels like to constantly look up to someone, and he realizes that his honest feelings are not what All Might needs to hear right now. So he swallows down his self-doubt, and says instead—)

“Everything good about me came from trying to be like you.”

Toshinori blinks at the sudden declaration. Midoriya swallows thickly, but then he meets Toshinori’s eyes squarely.

“All my life, I’ve tried to be like you. So if I’m like your mentor… then that means you are, too.”

Those words wash over Toshinori like a warm wave. He looks into Midoriya’s earnest green eyes in surprise.

And then, he smiles.

Toshinori flips the hand that’s under Midoriya’s so that they’re palm to palm and squeezes the boy’s smaller hand.

“Thank you, my boy.”

*

They continue talking about small things afterward. Both of them exchange tales about their respective times training under Gran Torino, sharing laughs and shudders in turn. When the sun fully sets under the horizon and the air chills, Toshinori pulls out a blanket to wrap around Midoriya’s shoulders.

Midoriya blinks down at the green blanket with white hearts printed on it.

“You sure have a lot of green stuff,” he comments almost absently, fingering the soft blanket. “Those plushies you gave me were green,

and that bento box and cloth were green too... is green your favourite colour?"

Toshinori pauses to think about it, and finds to his surprise that yes, he somehow *did* accumulate a large number of green things, and at some point green *has* become his favourite colour.

"Yes," he affirms, both to Midoriya and himself.

"Oh. It was never in any of your interviews... I guess I kinda thought it might be blue, or yellow," Midoriya says, clearly looking at Toshinori's hair and eyes, probably thinking about his hero costume too. And that may have been true, once. Toshinori *had* adored those bright and bold colours. But now...

Toshinori smiles as he looks into the green, green eyes of his boy.

"Well, if you add blue to yellow, you get green."

*

Ever since Hosu, Shouto has been sitting with Midoriya and his groups of friends at lunch.

He had *wanted* to since the Sports Festival, but he hadn't known how to approach them or if it was even alright to approach them at all. So he had kept his distance, watching Midoriya smile and laugh among his friends with a certain longing.

But following the Hosu incident, Shouto finds that he too has become a part of that group almost without him even noticing it. Shouto had a connection with Midoriya, yes, but he had been hesitant to impose on his other friends. But after coming back from the internships, it felt only natural for Shouto, Midoriya, and Iida to stick together.

Practically living together in the same hospital room for a few days does that to you, he supposes. Not that he's complaining. The others, like Uraraka, had seemed a bit surprised at first but had soon beamed at him and readily accepted his presence, and Shouto has been sitting with them, *a part of their group,* ever since.

It's one of those days when they're sitting together for lunch when it

happens.

Today the predominant topic of conversation is the final exams that are only a week away. Uraraka worries about the written exam while Iida and Midoriya talk about the practical, with Shouto mostly just keeping quiet and listening.

“It’s probably just a comprehensive test of everything we did in the first semester,” Hagakure supplies, and Asui nods in agreement.

“Then we’ll need to keep up our training on top of studying— oof!”

Shouto’s eyes snap up when he hears Midoriya’s yelp. Some student has knocked their elbow into the back of Midoriya’s head, and if the smirk on their face is anything to go by, it was undoubtedly deliberate.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the boy drawls without a hint of sincerity, looking down on Midoriya. “Your head was so big that I just couldn’t help myself.”

Midoriya just kind of stares at him while the rest of the table bristles on his behalf. Not only would this be beyond rude to anyone, but can’t this person see the bandages that are peaking out of Midoriya’s sleeves, clearly showing that he’s still a patient? Midoriya may be the only one who’s still wearing long sleeves instead of the short sleeves of the summer uniform everyone else has changed into (and Shouto is probably the only student who knows *why* Midoriya refuses to wear short sleeves) but the bandages are still clearly noticeable.

“You’re Monoma from class B, aren’t you?” Asui says, not a trace of her usual friendliness in her voice as she stares at him uncannily with her big eyes.

“How dare you!” Hagakure huffs.

But Monoma ignores both of them, using the fact that he’s standing next to where Midoriya is sitting to literally look down on Midoriya.

“I heard you guys ran into the Hero Killer,” he brings up abruptly with an infuriatingly nasty smile. “Following the Sports Festival, it looks like class A keeps getting more stunts that get you attention!”

And that’s just— *that’s* why he’s doing this? Because of jealousy of what, their *fame?*

Monoma continues rambling on about how the attention they've gained is going to end badly for them and whatnot. It's mostly pathetic, but Iida flinches a bit when Monoma exaggeratedly drawls on about how they're going to put others in danger. Iida is likely thinking about Stain and feeling guilty since he still thinks he's to blame for that.

While Shouto usually doesn't give people like this the time of day (and believe him, there had been a lot, what with his connection with Endeavor) his friends don't deserve this. Iida doesn't need to be hit in a sore spot that Monoma probably doesn't even know about. Midoriya doesn't deserve the utter bullshit Monoma is spouting.

Shouto's frown has been steadily growing grimmer the further Monoma goes, and he's just about to tell him where to shove it when Midoriya calmly puts down his chopsticks.

The clatter of it against his bowl rings eerily loud. In the split-second of silence where Monoma is distracted, Midoriya lifts his head. He looks Monoma in the eye. And his lips peel back to bare his teeth.

He gives Monoma a sharp, sharp grin that looks almost serene despite being more or less a snarl.

"I don't care what you say to me, but next time, please think twice before you disrespect what can be a sensitive topic to others," Midoriya says, his voice calm and polite despite the underlying threat and viscious protectiveness. "And as for attention; if *you'd* like the leader of the League of Villains to carry around *your* photo and show it to serial murderers instead, then please, by all means. *Be my guest.*"

Silence follows.

Midoriya is still smiling and his tone is level, but there's something in his voice and his eyes that makes Monoma falter and swallow thickly. He suddenly seems to realize that the three tables closest to them have fallen silent and are glaring daggers at him.

The awkward moment lasts until Kendo, another student from class B, delivers a chop to Monoma's neck and drags him away. She also offers up information she gained from an older student as an apology, telling them that the practical exam consists of fighting against robots like the entrance exam.

The air eases up after that, most of class A talking about the tidbit Kendo revealed. But Shouto catches sight of Iida staring at Midoriya

for a long moment.

"...My thanks, Midoriya," the bespeckled boy says uncharacteristically quietly.

But Midoriya just cocks his head. "For what?"

Typical Midoriya.

Both Iida and Shouto know Midoriya well enough to realize that he only stepped up against Monoma because he disrespected Iida's situation. Shouto is reminded of when they met Endeavor after their match in the Sports Festival. Apparently Midoriya hadn't said anything to Endeavor when they had first met, but he had *burned* the man when he'd tried to get to Shouto.

Shouto doesn't know if he's more fond and grateful or exasperated and worried about Midoriya's selfless and protective tendencies.

"By the way, Deku," Uraraka breaks in. She gives Midoriya a *look*.

"You didn't tell us that the creepy hand guy has a fanboy crush on you!"

Midoriya sputters.

"That's not— that sounds *so* wrong on so many levels—"

Hagakure breaks out into peals of laughter and Uraraka is wearing a triumphant grin. Unlike Monoma's inferiority and jealousy, everyone here knows that this is class A's way of showing their care. And to have a good laugh.

Ever since finding out that focusing positive attention on Midoriya works best to put him off balance, it looks like class A has made it their mission to do it as much as possible in the name of good-natured teasing. (Shouto is sure he isn't the only one who realizes what that implies: that Midoriya isn't used to having others compliment or appreciate him. It's probably one of the reasons some of their classmates seem to have made it their personal mission to do it as much as possible.) The 'I won't let you down' joke and Midoriya's increasing popularity have both been used liberally. Midoriya himself seems to be flustered but never seems to truly dislike it, usually blushing in embarrassment but also looking a bit flattered.

Personally, Shouto approves.

That blush suits him well.

“First Stain, and now Shigaraki. Midoriya must be villain catnip, ribbit,” Asui hums, and though her expression is impassive as always there’s a mischevious glint in her eyes.

Midoriya groans good-naturedly. Their friends laugh, and Shouto feels a smile tugging at his own lips.

Not everyone may be favourable to them. But as long as they have each other, they’ll be fine.

*

The days pass by, and soon enough the written exams are over and it’s time for the practical exam.

Aizawa lines up with the other teachers in front of the students of class A who are suited up and waiting.

“Alright,” he begins, “let’s start your practical exam.”

He goes on explaining that it’s possible to fail and not be taken on the summer training camp. Ashido and Kaminari, who have quirks that are ill-suited to be used on people, practically vibrate with confidence since they’ve heard word that they’re going against robots.

Well. They’re wrong.

Nezu pops out of the folds of Aizawa’s capture weapon (the Principal always did have a fondness for dramatics) and explains that considering current circumstances, they’re going to have the students pair off against a teacher instead. He emphasizes the need to be as realistic as possible, announcing the news almost gleefully as Ashido and Kaminari are frozen in disbelief.

Like he said. Dramatics.

Aizawa sighs and takes over.

“Your partner and teacher have already been assigned. Your tendencies, your grades, your relationships are all factors that have been considered, so without further ado— First, Todoroki and Bakugo.

You two are up against All Might."

A collective gasp goes around the class. Todoroki and Bakugo kind of gape, both at each other and at All Might, and the other students aren't that better off. Aizawa hides a smirk in the folds of his capture weapon and starts listing off the other teams.

"Ashido and Kaminari against the Principal, Uraraka and Aoyama against No. Thirteen, Iida and Ojiro against Power Roader..."

Once he's done, Iida's hand shoots into the air, straight as a flagpole.

"But sir! We have an uneven number of students! Will there be a group with three students, like we usually have in other exercises?"

At those words, everyone turns to look at Midoriya as if on cue, seeing as he's the only one who hasn't been assigned a partner or a teacher yet.

"Ah. As for Midoriya, you're getting special treatment," Aizawa drawls. His students shoot him looks that are mildly terrified.

Aizawa feels his face split into a grin that Yamada had once called his *shit-eating villain face.*

"You will be up against me, one on one."

At this announcement, Kirishima promptly puts one hand on Midoriya's shoulder and pats it sympathetically.

"I thought Todoroki and Bakugo against All Might was rough, but man. Rest in peace, dude."

Sero puts a hand on the other shoulder.

"It was nice knowing you."

Midoriya seems too shell-shocked to reply.

Brats.

*

Izuku is still shell-shocked after he's been dropped off at the middle of the arena for his practical exam.

Fighting against a teacher is already hard enough. Fighting *one on one* against a teacher is ridiculous. Fighting *one on one* against *Aizawa* is nigh *unimaginable.*

It's worse for Izuku than for any of his other classmates because while all of class 1-A has a healthy dose of respect for the underground hero, Eraserhead holds a special place in Izuku's heart. This is the hero he'd looked up to for a full decade. For Izuku, Eraserhead's pedestal is way up there with All Might's. The very thought of going up against him, even in a mock battle, is just... *mind-blowing.*

In that sense, he feels sympathy and empathy for Todoroki and Bakugo for having to go up against *All Might,* but at least they get partners (even if they don't seem likely to do anything approaching team play with each other). Izuku has no idea how he's going to pass this exam on his own. The rules are to either cuff the teacher or have at least one person escape within the thirty-minute time limit, and that puts Izuku at a serious disadvantage. Things would be so much easier if one person distracts the teacher while the other makes a run for it, but, as already mentioned, no partner in the first place, so.

He's screwed.

Izuku sighs mournfully even as he tries to think up a plan. His mind is in overdrive, scrambling and racing as the countdown begins.

[Everyone in position?] the speakers ring, and Izuku readies himself by charging up Full Cowl. Green sparks flit across his body and he almost vibrates from the compressed energy.

[Ready... Go!]

As soon as the signal is given, Izuku flies like an arrow.

Commence Plan A-1: *run for it.*

Ever since Izuku started using his quirk, if there was one thing he had, it's mobility. While it's most effective when Uraraka makes him weightless with her Zero Gravity, even without that Izuku is light enough that he can *pull* himself across distances with impressive speed. After taking tips from Bakugo's moves at the Sports Festival (thanks Kacchan) (sorry-not-sorry Kacchan) he can use the *push* of his fire to adjust his trajectory where before he could only move in one

direction and had no breaks. And Gran Torino had beaten Full Cowl into him, letting Izuku further negate the jarring momentum of his pull and giving him much needed finesse.

This combination gives him a huge advantage. In class A, the only one who can beat Izuku is terms of speed is probably Iida, and even then it's only if they're on a straight lane with no obstacles.

Speed is Izuku's strength, and he's going to play to it for as long as he can. Aizawa will erase his quirk and thus his speed if finds him, so basically Izuku is playing a game of hide-and-seek and keep-away. The arena is a mock town, so even if he's found, he can duck behind buildings and get out of Aizawa's line of sight if he's lucky.

Thankfully Aizawa's abilities are not as destructive as heroes like Power Roader or—god forbid—All Might. That means he doesn't have to worry much about property damage and can focus on his task.

Izuku speeds through the streets, veering to the west side of the arena and going around instead of making a straight line to the exit in hopes of not running into Aizawa. UA has, as with most things, gone Plus Ultra with its construction and the arena is *huge.* While that means it'll take longer for Izuku to run through it, hopefully it also means that Aizawa won't be able to find him at least for a while.

He should have known better.

Izuku trips and nearly falls into a pond as Full Cowl suddenly vanishes, leaving him reeling from the momentum. He spares a look over his shoulder and there, sure enough, Aizawa is pursuing him from a distance, jumping off telephone poles and running along fences. While Izuku knows how good Eraserhead is, he should be weighed down by those weights the support department designed. *How* is he still moving like that with Hatsume's weights on?!

He pushes down his incredulity and starts running again, quirk or no quirk.

Time for Plan A-2: *if Eraserhead finds you, keep as much distance as possible and get out of his line of sight.*

Izuku has followed Eraserhead's career religiously, and despite him being an underground hero, Izuku still knows his style well enough. To put it simply, Izuku has a snowball's chance in hell against the hero in close combat, regardless of whether he's weighed down or not. Izuku modelled his fighting style on Eraserhead's, after all. Like Stain,

he's similar but *better* than Izuku in every aspect.

So Izuku doesn't even entertain thoughts of confronting the hero. Instead, he races towards the closest corner and skids around it before the hero can close the distance between them, effectively putting himself out of Eraserhead's line of sight and out of the influence of Eraserhead's quirk.

Full Cowl sparks back to life and Izuku shoots off, winding around buildings and taking detours in hope of shaking Eraserhead from his trail.

But his quirk flashes out of existence again and Izuku yelps as he skids on a patch of sand, sputtering at the grains of sand that fly into his mouth. His situational awareness has him whipping around to find Eraserhead jumping from roof to roof like a ninja.

"So cool," he can't help but fanboy a little before he spits out the rest of the sand and throws himself under a bench to break Eraserhead's line of sight. As soon as his quirk returns to him Izuku *pulls* himself across the park as fast as he can.

Eraserhead is quick to erase his quirk again, but his *pull* has given Izuku enough momentum to dodge around a corner and take off running again.

The pattern continues on for a while. Izuku runs using everything he can (though he can't use his pull or fire as effectively as he'd like since they're in a mock town and the alleys are short and winding), Eraserhead somehow finds him like the ninja he is and erases Izuku's quirk from a distance, Izuku jumps out of his line of sight before Eraserhead can close their distance and bind him, and repeat.

At some point Izuku gives up on trying to lay false trails and just heads straight to the exit while evading Eraserhead to the best of his abilities because it's soon clear that no matter what he does, the hero is still going to find him. He just grits his teeth and does his best to adapt according to the circumstance.

But the next time Izuku's quirk is erased, Izuku doesn't find Eraserhead behind him. Instead, the hero bursts out from a tree *in front* of Izuku.

He barely has time to yelp before he's strung up and dangling like a cocoon.

Unbidden, the words 'Plan A-3: *if you're caught, you're screwed*' flash across his mind.

Eraserhead ties the end of the capture weapon securely, then throws down caltrops at the ground under Izuku for good measure. Only then does he pull out a watch from his pocket and glance at it.

"Sixteen minutes. Not bad," he hums.

Izuku groans. He halfheartedly tests the bonds—yup, quirk still erased—before slumping.

"But not *good enough,* seeing I got caught," he points out, though to be fair, this *is* Eraserhead. He should probably be proud that he even lasted this long.

After all, not even Hisashi had managed to escape the hero.

"How did you keep finding me?" Izuku asks in an attempt to direct his thoughts from dwelling on his father. This is the first time he's been able to be alone with his hero in a long while. He is *not* going to let Hisashi taint this opportunity.

"Practice and experience," Eraserhead... no, Aizawa now—seeing the way he's slouching, he's back in teacher mode—Aizawa answers. "Once you chase down enough villains, you get a feel for how people tend to move."

Izuku swallows thickly at being compared to villains.

Thankfully, at that moment, the speakers ring out and cut Izuku's line of thought.

[This is an announcement. The first team to pass is Asui and Yaoyorozu!]

Izuku perks up in happiness for them, then slumps back in his bindings.

If Izuku had a partner, they could be running for the exit gate at this very moment or distracting Aizawa so Izuku could get free. But instead, he has Aizawa's undivided attention. Which might be *great* in other circumstances, but, well, circumstances.

"I really think I'm at a serious disadvantage, sensei, especially without even a partner," he says morosely.

“True,” Aizawa acknowledges, pushing up his goggles to look Izuku in the eye. “Which is why I’m going to give you a hint. What’s the purpose of the practical exam, Midoriya?”

Izuku blinks.

“It’s a comprehensive test on everything we did on the first semester… is what you told us,” he starts hesitantly. “But you also said that our partners and teachers were assigned considering our tendencies, grades, and relationships.”

He thinks back on the groups.

“Sato and Kirishima both have strong, simple quirks and were matched against Cementos who can make infinite fodder for them,” he thinks out loud. Aizawa doesn’t stop him, so he continues. “Koda and Jiro have sound based quirks and were pitted against Present Mic who has far superior volume. Todoroki and Kacchan are both powerful and competitive, but will be overwhelmed by All Might if they don’t get over themselves and work together…” he trails off as it slowly dawns on him.

“Weaknesses,” Izuku realizes. “The practical exams are tailored to specifically address our weaknesses.”

“Good,” Aizawa acknowledges. “Now, then. The next question is: what’s yours?”

For a moment Izuku can’t respond. The answer doesn’t come as readily because he has *so many* weaknesses.

But he tries to think of what would land him with Aizawa, and specifically *alone* with Aizawa.

“…I modelled my entire fighting style on yours, so in that sense, you’re the Present Mic to my Jiro or Koda,” he begins slowly. “But… but that’s not all, is it?”

Aizawa makes a noise of approval. Then he starts ticking off his fingers.

“The entrance exam. The quirk assessment test. The USJ. The Sports Festival. Stain.” Aizawa looks Izuku in the eye. “Name me *one* major incident where you didn’t get seriously injured; or, more specifically, where you didn’t injure *yourself.”*

Izuku opens his mouth, falters, then closes it, because he honestly *can't*. He'd used his quirk at the entrance exam and quirk assessment test fully knowing that he'd be burned. He knew One For All would break his bones with every use and used it anyways until Gran Torino guided him. And even fighting Stain, when even his fire didn't burn him and Full Cowl didn't shatter his bones, he still *pulled* Stain's blades towards himself to shield his friends with his own body.

Aizawa gives him a knowing look at Izuku's silence.

"You fixed the backlash that made you throw up. You even found a way not to get burned and to not break your bones. Which is good, but it's not enough. It's not the point."

Aizawa gestures towards where Izuku's hands are tied behind his back, reminding him of his newest assortment of scars on his right hand.

"Your problem is that you don't just accept the possibility of injury; you embrace it, you plan for it, you think nothing of it. And that's *not* okay. Especially if you want to succeed as a hero," Aizawa says almost vehemently.

"I... I thought you need to be willing to sacrifice yourself to be a hero," Izuku replies, taken back by Aizawa's intensity.

"That's true too. But everything has a line, and there's a point where even virtue becomes vice."

The hero... no, the teacher sighs at Izuku's expression, likely picking up on his confusion, and elaborates. (At this point, Izuku feels like he's listening to one of Aizawa's lectures instead of going through a practical exam, despite the fact that he's still strung up and dangling from a tree.)

"Think of All Might. No one worries for him or thinks twice about relying on him. Why? Because he's the No. 1 hero. Because people expect him to win in whatever situation. Because everyone sees him as the symbol of peace. ...Now, think of me."

Aizawa grimaces as he says that, as if it physically pains him to put himself in the centre of attention, but he plows on regardless.

"Back in the USJ, when I took on the villains everyone relaxed because they thought the situation was handled. Everyone, except you. Why?"

This time it's not a rhetorical question. Izuku swallows as Aizawa's red eyes pierce him.

"...Because I knew it *wasn't* handled," he says truthfully. "I... I was worried for you."

"Exactly," Aizawa grimaces. "You were right. I'm not suited to fight against a group for a long period of time. I put on a front and acted like I had control over the situation so that all of you wouldn't panic and evacuate calmly. And it worked on everyone except you. You knew, you worried, and you hesitated."

Aizawa lets out a sigh.

"All Might isn't the only one who is a symbol. People should be comfortable asking help from any hero, and for that to happen, they can't be worried about the hero. That means projecting an image, and *that* means you can't afford to get injuries you can avoid."

He gives Izuku a hard look.

"If you keep injuring yourself, then no one is going to ask for your help. You can't save anyone if you don't save yourself first."

Izuku is speechless.

He recalls how he had stepped between his parents when Hisashi became violent. He remembers taking the beating in Inko's stead. He remembers how elated he'd been that he'd been able to protect his mother.

But Inko had cried.

"I'm sorry, Izuku," she had sobbed. *"I am **so sorry**, Izuku."*

And only now, more than a full decade later, does he finally have an inkling of understanding.

Oh, he thinks faintly.

So that's why she'd apologized.

*

Aizawa waits quietly as Midoriya processes what he's told him.

"You're getting special treatment," he had said before the exam, and he'd been telling the truth, though not in the sense that Midoriya is the only one going against a teacher one on one. No, Midoriya's special treatment is not in the makeup but the context of his exam.

One of the things UA tries to teach its students is the ability to set aside their natural instincts and brave the violence of the world of heroes and villains.

It's why they condoned and even encouraged the students to go all out on each other at the Sports Festival. It's a process of exposing them to rigorous yet contained settings, slowly easing them in so that by the time they graduate, they'll be prepared for the harsh world.

But of course, his problem child has the exact opposite problem of everyone else: he has *too little* self-preservation and is *too willing* to sacrifice himself.

(It probably has something to do with the myriad of old scars he keeps covered under his sleeves and hidden by his smile.) (Aizawa's gone through all the files of his old cases by now, but he still hasn't been able to find one that looks like it has to do with Midoriya. Perhaps he wasn't directly related and thus not mentioned by name. That's going to make things harder to find, but he's not insensitive enough to outright ask.) (So, as of yet, Aizawa doesn't know what happened to make Midoriya so dismissive and even expectant of his injuries. *But he sure as hell will find out.)*

This is the reason Aizawa was matched with Midoriya. He can erase Midoroya's quirk on the off chance that the kid tries to pull another stunt and injure himself. And his specialty is capture, not destruction; the last thing he wants is for himself to give Midoriya any injuries when he's trying to preach self-preservation and hammer what should be natural instinct into Midoriya's skull.

Heck, he'd even taken care to only erase Midoriya's quirk when he was near bodies of water, sand, or open spaces so that the sudden disappearance of his speed wouldn't make him slam into a wall or something.

He presented the idea that Midoriya should take better care of himself as a requirement to become a good hero. And while that's true (and is also the reasoning that will likely get to Midoriya most effectively) it isn't the entire reason. If he's being honest, he just really, really, *really*

wants this kid to stop hurting himself, regardless of whatever impact it may have on being a hero.

Aizawa sighs a little as he eyes Midoriya.

“Do you understand the lesson?”

Multiple emotions flit across Mdiroya’s face. Aizawa can almost hear his mind whirling.

“I... I think so,” he says. His voice is hesitant and there’s a crease between his brows.

Good. That means he isn’t just brushing this off but thinking about it seriously.

Midoriya perks up from where he’s dangling under the tree.

“Wait, does this mean that I pass the exam?”

Aizawa snorts.

“No,” he says blithely. “Understanding the lesson is just a prerequisite. You still have to follow through like everyone else.”

At that, Midoriya’s eyes take on a glint.

“Well then. I guess it’s a good thing Plan B was already in motion.”

And before Aizawa can process his words, Midoriya suddenly *rips apart* the capture weapon that was binding him with his bare hands.

Aizawa is taken by surprise. His capture weapon is sturdy enough that Midoriya shouldn’t be able to tear it without using the super strength of his quirk, and Aizawa is erasing that right now, so *how?*

Midoriya grabs the portion of the capture weapon that’s still tied to the tree branch, hanging above the caltrops instead of dropping down on them and risking injuring himself. (Good, he’s taking the lesson to heart.)

And then he throws the bundle of ripped cloth straight into Aizawa’s face.

Aizawa can’t help it.

He blinks.

And in that split second Midoriya lights up in green sparks and vanishes into the tree, the leaves hiding him from Aizawa's sight and quirk. There's a rustle as he moves, and Aizawa catches him running towards the exit gate.

Aizawa pauses before setting out after him. There's a little less than ten minutes until the time is up, and Aizawa already has the layout of this fake town memorized— he can afford to delay a few seconds since he'll be able to cut off Midoriya's path.

He looks down at the bundle of his ripped capture weapon to find out how Midoriya tore out of it while Aizawa was erasing his quirk throughout their conversation. As he runs his fingers over the length, he finds a section that has tiny pinpricks of brown along the tattered edges.

Scorches, he realizes.

Since Aizawa kept erasing Midoriya's quirk, the only times he could have used his fire would have been the split seconds when Aizawa blinked. The burns are small enough that they would have made barely any smoke, and Aizawa hadn't been able to smell anything at all since he was upwind. But to make enough tiny burns to rip through the sturdy capture tape while still being subtle enough that Aizawa didn't notice...

He must have planned this from the beginning.

Brat.

Aizawa grins. He drops the rags and takes off running to cut off Midoriya's escape. He may approve of the kid's actions, but that doesn't mean he's going to just *let* him pass.

Judging from the direction Midoriya took off in and the subconscious pattern he moved in before, Aizawa makes an educated approximation of Midoriya's position. He runs over fences and roofs to save time, and just as he turns a corner—

A ball of fire flies into his face.

"—!!"

Aizawa instinctively jumps into a niche he spots between two walls, narrowly avoiding getting scorched. His mind is racing—has Midoriya decided to fight back? Or is this just a tactic to delay Aizawa so he has

more time to run to the exit?—when he hears a distinct click-*click* near his feet.

He slowly lowers his gaze.

There, cuffed around both his ankles, are the handcuffs that mark the "villain" caught.

Aizawa cranes his head around to look behind him, and sure enough, Midoriya is crouched right behind him, frozen, looking up at him with wide eyes almost as if he himself can't believe that just worked.

[Midoriya has passed the exam!] Recovery Girl announces cheerily over the speakers, breaking their pseudo staring contest.

"...What." Aizawa manages.

Midoriya blinks, then starts explaining rapidly.

"You, uh, said that you predicted where I would go, so I predicted where *you* would go based on that. And then I found a good spot for an ambush and hid behind this trash can and blocked all other paths with fire so you'd come in here, close enough for me to cuff you, and when you did, I... cuffed you?"

He says it like a question, like he's not sure if Aizawa will approve.

"...Did you hurt yourself at all?" he asks.

"No," Midoriya confirms. "Not a single scratch."

At those words, Aizawa reaches out a hand and places it on Midoriya's head—and for all that it's almost become a habit at this point, it's the first time he's doing this with his bare hand and not a cast—and pats his curly hair.

"You did good," he reassures, feeling a small smile tugging at his lips.

Midoriya looks up at him with wide, starry eyes.

And then, he *beams.*

+ Omake +

“Um, sensei? I can free you if you give me the keys.”

Aizawa gives him a doleful look.

“It would defeat the purpose if the villain had the keys. They’re back at the bus.”

The bus that he can’t get to, because Midoriya has cuffed his feet together and he can’t walk. *Of course* this happened.

At this revelation Midoriya looks alarmed, then thoughtful, then earnest as he hesitantly reaches out both his arms towards Aizawa.

“I could… carry you there…?”

Aizawa stares at his problem child.

Midoriya stares back.

It’s a full five minutes later that Aizawa finally caves and is picked up by Midoriya, again.

Bridal style, again.

Yamada is never going to let him live this down.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku: So cool! / I based my entire style on you

Aizawa: *pretends he didn’t hear anything*

Me: You know you heard it; you can’t ignore it forever.

Aizawa: *PRETENDS HE DIDN’T HEAR ANYTHING*

*

Toshi: You remind me of my hero.

Izuku: Really?! (awed)

Toshi: Yes. Your hairstyle does.

Izuku:

Toshi: *TROLL*

*

I love writing Toshinori being such a dad troll XD and Aizawa having no clue whatsoever about what to do with Izuku's admiration of him XD

Just in case you don't remember, the first time Izuku vowed to protect All Might was way back in Chapter 2, before he even got OFA.

Todoroki Hopeless Shouto: isn't sure if he can sit with Izuku at lunch; doesn't think twice about fondling his hand.

Oh Todoroki, you beautiful mess.

Just in case anyone is wondering, Yaoyorozu got paired with Asui (who used her special brand of blunt honesty to help Yaomomo break through her shell) while Tokoyami was paired with Sero (who both have long-range abilities but are weaker in close-range).

I always appreciate comments, but I've got to take this space to thank you all for the simply astounding response to the last chapter. Seriously. You guys are my light and will to keep writing and posting. Thank you so, so much.

Aaaaaand… I hope you enjoyed this fluff/filler chapter because

the next two chapters are titled <Out of the Frying Pan> and <Into the Fire>...

IZUKU HEADBANG

Out of the Frying Pan

Chapter Notes

I love how when people saw the next chapters are titled <out of the frying pan & into the fire> they were like "Oh no you're going to hurt these babies... I approve, I thrive on PAIN"
Sorry to disappoint you all, but this chapter has more shameless TodoDeku fluff than ever.
Rest assured, the figurative “fire” will be very present in the next chapter. Lots and lots of fire. So much fire. Like, all the fire.

Oh, and for those who are wondering: yes Todo and Baku passed the practicals. But just barely. By the skin of their teeth. They didn’t really work together to the extent BakuDeku managed in canon, but they did reach a kind-of understanding. They both tried fighting All Might, but when the time was almost up, Bakugo just threw Todoroki through the gates (because he didn’t want to be the one to have to “run away”. Yeet!) Todoroki was not impressed. But hey, what works works, right? ᕕ(ᐛ)ᕗ

And my favorite part of the AN: FANART!!!!!

BYW/Frozen crossover by apassingwolf: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/179808955209/so-here-i-was-re-reading-burn-your-wings-by

FireFist Izuku by stopthislifeiwanttogetoff: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/179355088884/so-ive-been-on-a-fanfic-binge-recently-and

BYW/Spirited Away crossover by leefsuki: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/178885609709/inktober-d8-star-loosely-based-off

Izuku with bunny ears by spidermonkey1292: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/178835401584/a-little-bun-bun-midoriya-in-appreciation-of-your

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The results for the practical exams have been announced, and Uraraka practically bounces on the balls of her feet on the way home after

school.

“I can’t believe it!” she gushes to her friends. “It’s so great that everyone gets to go to the summer training camp!”

“Yes. But we were fooled again by Aizawa-sensei’s logical ruse…!” Iida laments.

Midoriya chuckles, and while Uraraka still isn’t as good at reading Todoroki’s impassive face as Midoriya evidently is, she thinks the line of the boy’s mouth might be more relaxed than usual.

“And going shopping together tomorrow will be like a celebratory event! Which reminds me— are you sure you can’t come, Todoroki?”

The boy gives Uraraka a look that might be apologetic.

“I have to… visit someone, on weekends,” he explains to her, though he ends the sentence with a glance at Midoriya.

And there it is again; an entire conversation seems to pass between them in that split second of a moment, Todoroki looking like he expects Midoriya to understand *exactly* what (or who) he means and Midoriya in turn understanding *perfectly*.

Uraraka tries very hard to keep her smile unwavering and stomp out the slight jealousy that sometimes surfaces when faced with just how… *intimate* the two boys with half-fire-quirks are. Uraraka isn’t dumb; she knows that there’s something between Midoriya and Todoroki— heck, even between the two and Iida, given the recent Hosu incident—that they can’t really tell her for some reason. And she’s okay with that. She may not like it, and may feel a little left out on occasion, but she knows her friends—and yes, this now includes Todoroki too—would never willingly leave her in the dark out of mean intentions. Some things are just private.

So she smiles at the way Iida gestures enthusiastically and Midoriya mutters on a tangent with Todoroki’s dry remarks sprinkled in like seasoning.

They’ve almost made it to the front gates when Midoriya perks up and waves to someone off to the side.

“Shinsou!”

The boy from General Education turns at the call. He seems a little

surprised to find their group, but he nods once in Midoriya's direction.

Midoriya smiles apologetically at them. "I have something to ask Shinsou; catch you guys later?"

"Of course!" Iida reassures while Todoroki just inclines his head slightly. Uraraka cheerfully waves him off.

She notices that Shinsou has stopped walking and is patiently waiting for Midoriya to jog up to him, and they seem to quickly fall into conversation once they're in speaking distance. She would say she's surprised at how easy their interaction seems considering the brutal beatdown Midoriya had delivered to Shinsou, but then again, this is *Midoriya* they're talking about.

...Come to think of it, pretty much everyone Midoriya fights with seems to get along better with him afterwards. While she can't say Midoriya has taken a liking to any of the villains he's fought, Shigaraki and Stain certainly seem to have taken a shine to him after fighting Midoriya. And Bakugo, Shinsou, and even Todoroki have all grown closer to Midoriya after fighting him.

Huh.

"Maybe I should challenge Deku to a duel or something," Uraraka muses absent-mindedly.

Todoroki raises his brows and Iida's eyes widen comically.

Uraraka giggles at their reactions.

*

Shinsou waits for Midoriya to leave his small group of friends and catch up with him. He hasn't seen the other boy much since the Sports Festival since they're in entirely different departments, meaning they seldom cross paths naturally in school. But Shinsou has been reluctantly more attentive to Midoriya (considering he's the one person who straight up told him the one thing he's always wanted to hear *(you can be a hero)* in his own brutally honest, violently persistent, self-destructive, impossible to ignore kind of way) so he's heard *of* the other boy.

“Hey,” Midoriya greets him softly when he draws close enough to speak without shouting. “How’ve you been? Sorry I didn’t catch up with you earlier—”

“Don’t worry about it,” Shinsou cuts him off, not being able to help the small quirk of his lips. “I’ve seen the news. Everyone knows you were… *occupied.”*

Midoriya wrinkles his nose and flushes a little.

“Don’t remind me,” he grouses, looking like all the attention he must have gotten these past few days has him slightly terrified. He shakes his head as if to clear it, very obviously changing tracks. “Anyways, I’d like to just talk to you, but I also have a proposal, or even a favour.”

“Oh?” Shinsou asks, raising his eyebrows. He doesn’t have a single clue what *Midoriya* could want from *him.*

But Midoriya nods as if it’s the most natural thing in the world.

“Yeah. You’re still aiming to be a hero, right?”

The way he says it makes it feel like he’s more confirming a fact than asking an actual question, like he has utterly no doubt Shinsou will continue aiming for his dream.

That simple faith makes him swallow thickly.

“…Yeah,” he affirms, and Midoriya nods like he expected it.

He probably doesn’t even know how much that means to Shinsou.

“I’m guessing you don’t have much opportunity to experiment with your quirk, though.”

That might have stung, once. But after hearing a little about the absolute trauma Midoriya went through with his own quirk, Shinsou feels like he’s *with* Midoriya on an inside joke instead of being the brunt of it.

“Obviously,” he comments dryly. “Normal people don’t volunteer to be mind controlled.”

At that, Midoriya raises his hand and points a finger at himself.

“Volunteer,” he says.

Shinsou blinks.

“You’re joking.”

“Nope— oh shit—”

“You’re *not* joking,” Shinsou says in awe as he releases Midoriya from his control. “Why, though? You said it was a favour. What’s the catch?”

Midoriya grimaces slightly as he looks down at his own hands.

“I need help training my quirk— specifically, the fire part of it.”

Shinsou almost gawks at him.

“And you want *me* to help with that?”

While it had taken him a moment to acknowledge it to himself, Shinsou genuinely appreciates what Midoriya did for him at the Sports Festival. The more he thinks about everything Midoriya said, the more he understands just how much of himself Midoriya was laying bare to Shinsou, just how much of himself Midoriya was risking, in an attempt to help Shinsou.

And after watching that match against Todoroki, Shinsou also realized the *huge* bullet he’d dodged when Midoriya hadn’t used his quirk while fighting him.

But now he wants Shinsou to face those goddamn fiery *angel wings?*

Shinsou manages to reign in his disbelief enough to formulate a question.

“Why not get Todoroki to help you? He has ice, not to mention a fire quirk too.”

“Did you see the second round of the tournament?” Yes, which is *why he’s asking*— “Fire can melt ice if applied slowly, but a lot of ice against a lot of fire kinda just... explodes into steam if we’re not careful. It isn’t exactly the best option for negating fire,” Midoriya explains, and okay, considering how the entire arena *blew up,* yeah, maybe not too smart to repeat that.

“And while we do both have fire quirks, they don’t work exactly the same way. Todoroki says he’s never been burned by his quirk. Besides, we’re both too inexperienced with our fires to be messing around with

them by ourselves."

Midoriya's right-hand clenches, seemingly unconsciously.

"I... I've learned that I need to stop injuring myself when I can. My quirk... the fire part of it. It burns me, sometimes, but I don't know why or when. I need to train it, test out different scenarios, see if I can control the damage. But if I lose control, well, as I said, I don't want to injure myself anymore, so I need someone who can help. Aizawa-sensei would be ideal, but he's too busy. That's where you come in."

Comprehension dawns on Shinsou as he gets where Midoriya is going with this.

"...You're using me as a fire extinguisher," he deadpans.

Midoriya doesn't even pretend to deny it. "You get to experiment the capabilities of your quirk on a willing participant in exchange?" he offers.

"You're using me as a fire extinguisher in exchange for offering yourself as a guinea pig," Shinsou updates his assessment, voice flat in disbelief.

The other boy grins. But then his expression falls a little and his voice quiets.

"It's okay if you don't want to. The fire... my fire is dangerous, after all. But if you're okay with it... I would really, really appreciate the help."

Shinsou stares at Midoriya.

Because Shinsou knows *exactly* what Midoriya is doing. He's trying to train his own quirk, yes, but he's also genuinely trying to help with *Shinsou's* quirk. Let's face it, Midoriya could find someone else who's more suited to help, but he came to Shinsou specifically.

And while Shinsou might have refused pity or charity, Midoriya has made this offer enough of an *exchange* that the whole thing is palatable. It covers all the bases and presses all the right buttons, while still coming off as an innocent looking proposal to train together.

The extra bit about wanting help was just the final nail in the coffin. Because while Shinsou is many things, he is chiefly a hero aspirant.

And a hero should never ignore a person in need.

It's such a brilliant strategy that it leaves Shinsou wondering if Midoriya really is as clueless as he looks or if he's actually a genius mastermind under all that fluffy hair.

"Fine," Shinsou accepts (as if there was any other choice), unwittingly letting a smile curve his lips. "You be my guinea pig, I'll be your fire extinguisher."

Midoriya grins and holds out his phone.

"Once a week? We can pick the day through text."

Shinsou takes it and punches in his number.

"Sure. Text me."

And with that, they both have a training partner.

*

Around half of Class 1-A makes it to the Kiyashi Ward shopping mall the next day. Shinsou had declined when Izuku offered, and a few classmates who said they might come ended up not showing, but it's still a decent turn-up.

Some people in the crowd seem to have noticed their large group and recognized them.

"Oh! Aren't they those UA first years?"

"Good going at the Sports Festival!"

"Is that Midoriya?!"

At the last exclamation, Izuku tries to subtly hide behind Shoji's larger bulk. The other boy blinks down at him, then a mouth at the end of one tentacle grins mischievously.

"We can always do another victory lap if you want?"

Izuku blanches.

“Why must you do this to me?” he moans. “Tokoyami, help!”

Tokoyami nods with a straight face.

“Of course, Midoriya. I’m sure Dark Shadow will be thrilled to carry you around.”

“Wait, what?!” Izuku sputters.

At that moment, Dark Shadow chooses to pop its head out and give Izuku a thumbs up.

“I won’t let you down!” it chirps, making Izuku choke.

“Who taught you that— that is *so* not— what— *betrayal—”*

Class 1-A laugh at the familiar joke, then chatter amongst each other and divide into groups. Izuku ends up with Uraraka, Asui, Tokoyami, and Kirishima to look at sports and outdoor goods. They consult a map of the mall, then head to an elevator to get to the higher floors.

But before he steps inside, Izuku freezes.

“Deku?” Uraraka calls him, holding the door open for him.

Izuku’s eyes are wide, his feet rooted, his heart pounding.

But the next moment, he forces his face into a smile.

“Sorry, guys. Go on without me,” he manages to say. Then he reaches into the elevator to gently push Uraraka’s finger away from the ‘open’ button and hits ‘close’.

“Wait, Deku—”

“Midoriya?”

Confusion mars his friends’ faces and Uraraka reaches out for him, only to snatch her hand back as the elevator doors close. Izuku catches Uraraka’s surprised eyes and mouths *‘call the police.’*

He knows she understands the moment her eyes widen in horror, her gaze fixed on the figure Izuku can feel creeping up behind him.

The doors close.

Izuku stares at the digital number on top of the elevator and only

dares let out a breath of relief when the number switches from 1 to 2, indicating that his friends are out of immediate danger.

And no sooner than he does, a lanky arm slings itself across his shoulders and a clammy hand curves four fingers around his neck.

“Smart,” a low voice murmurs in Izuku’s ear. “Noticed me without even seeing me, did you?”

But of course he did. The crowd may have befuddled Izuku’s usual situational awareness so that he didn’t notice until the man approached so close. But while Izuku has only met this man in person once, the sheer malevolence this presence exudes is far too strong and far too *familiar* for Izuku to *not* be aware of after all his time with Hisashi.

Izuku keeps his head facing forwards and rolls his eyes to the side. He finds a hooded figure, limp pale hair framing a wrinkled face that he’s never seen this clearly. But it’s unmistakable who this is.

“...Shigaraki Tomura,” Izuku bites out.

The villain grins.

“Midoriya Izuku,” he responds in a sing-song voice. “Why don’t we have a chat?”

Izuku swallows thickly.

Before, he might have confronted Shigaraki. This is the leader of the League of Villains, alone with no lackeys or backup in sight. Izuku is sure he can keep bystander damage to minimal since he can *pull* Shigaraki’s destructive hands to himself. Even if Izuku himself gets critically injured, there’s a high chance he can hold Shigaraki until the police and pros (that Uraraka is hopefully calling this very moment) arrive and arrest the villain.

This is a golden opportunity to catch one of the most wanted villains in Japan.

But an iron-hard voice clamps down on Izuku’s line of thought.

“You can’t save anyone if you don’t save yourself first.”

It has barely been a single day since Izuku heard that.

Izuku thinks about his choices. He thinks about the pros and cons. He

thinks about the gain and loss.

He thinks about what Aizawa would want him to do.

He goes quietly with Shigaraki.

*

Tsukauchi listens intently as Midoriya recounts his meeting with Shigaraki. The other students had called the police and the pros at Midoriya's instruction, but by the time any of them got there Shigaraki had long disappeared. In that short time he'd been talking with Midoriya, so he's their only lead at the moment.

There are finger-shaped bruises forming around his neck and the kid's voice is becoming hoarser by the minute, but Midoriya's demeanour is calm and his voice is steady.

He should have expected no less from All Might's protégé.

The detective refills Midoriya's empty cup and the kid gives him a small but grateful smile before sipping the cool water.

"So by your account, it looks like your meeting was completely coincidental... and more importantly, the League isn't completely unified yet. But they're still going after All Might. That's more information than we had before. Thank you, Midoriya. Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

Midoriya hesitates. Tsukauchi isn't a detective for show, so he gives a reassuring smile.

"You can tell me about anything. I know All Might's secret, about One For All and All For One."

"Oh," the boy breathes, but he still doesn't spill immediately. "I'm—I'm really sorry, but may I confirm that first...?"

He looks so apologetic, but Tsukauchi is impressed rather than offended. Most children—even most adults—would have blindly trusted his words, relieved to find someone, anyone, they can share the burden with.

It seems Toshinori really outdid himself with his heir.

“Of course,” he nods approvingly, and Midoriya pulls out his phone. Tsukauchi waits for the boy to tap in a text, presumably to Toshinori. He breathes a sigh of relief when he receives an answer, and then he lifts his head to look Tsukauchi in the eye.

“All Might told me about his suspicion that All For One is still alive and acting behind the League, so I purposefully brought him up. I asked Shigaraki what All For One’s goals are to see if he knows who I’m talking about. Shigaraki denied he knew the man’s goals... but he *didn’t* deny he knew the man himself.”

Midoriya takes a fortifying breath.

“All For One is alive.”

Tsukauchi briefly closes his eyes. It’s everything they suspected and feared. And while the fact itself is horrible, it’s better to know for certain than operate on suspicions and half-formed theories.

“Thank you,” he tells Midoriya sincerely. “That’s an... *immense* help.”

They wrap up after that, getting ready to let Midoriya go home. But before they leave the room, Midoriya calls Tsukauchi in a small voice.

“I... I have a question, if that’s alright.”

The detective nods and Midoriya averts his gaze. While he had talked through the entirety of the debrief calmly, this is the first time the boy looks unsure.

“When Shigaraki had me, I wasn’t sure if I should risk myself and hold on to him or go with him quietly. My teacher had recently told me I should avoid injury when I can, so I chose the latter. But not only did he get away, but I ended up *helping* him with some kind of breakthrough.” Midoriya takes a deep breath, then looks up at Tsukauchi. “I... I think I know what my teachers would tell me if I asked them. They *care* about me,” (and Tsukauchi notes that there’s a lingering sense of wonder and disbelief as he says those words that should be common sense,) “so they’re probably biased. But I’d like your opinion as a professional. ...Should I have just confronted him?”

The kid looks up at Tsukauchi with his question, awaiting his judgement.

Tsukauchi doesn't know Midoriya very well. But he has heard Toshinori worry over his protégé over a cup of sake, and has had access to the boy's files on the USJ and Stain since he's investigating the League of Villains. Everything he's heard, seen, and read suggests that Midoriya is the type of person who could and would throw himself to the wolves without hesitation to save someone else.

Trust Toshinori to find someone with a heart that bleeds as much as his own and make them his heir. Probably serves him right, having to worry about his protégé as much as Tsukauchi himself and others like Sir Nighteye had to worry about him.

Poetic justice at its finest.

So Midoriya is wrong in that Tsukauchi is unbiased because while he is a professional, he also knows just how utterly nerve-wracking it is to worry for someone who has little care for their own safety. But he *is* honest when he gives his answer.

Tsukauchi makes a point in looking Midoriya straight in the eye. He doesn't take an indulgent tone or treat Midoriya like a child. His voice is every bit as serious as when he's making a formal report.

"Here's my opinion as a professional who's dealt with heroes and villains for years. Midoriya. You made the right call."

He doesn't go into details. He doesn't cite the many reasons. He states just the fact, simple and short, and drills all the honesty and sincerity he can into it.

Midoriya looks up at him with wide eyes.

"Okay," he finally whispers. "Okay."

*

"Midoriya, my boy!"

Izuku blinks at the familiar voice that greets him as soon as he steps outside the police station.

"All—" he cuts himself off before he can finish the name. While Tsukauchi is the only person in sight, he won't risk outing All Might's

secret by calling the hero in public when he's in his true form.

But All Might doesn't seem to even care about that as he hurries over. And as soon as the man reaches Izuku, he pulls him into a desperate hug.

"My boy," All Might chokes out as he squeezes Izuku to his chest. "I'm so sorry I wasn't there to save you."

Izuku carefully wraps his arms around All Might's frail body, as pleased and surprised as he always is when the hero gives him a hug. (Even if it feels like All Might needs this hug more than Izuku does.)

"Don't be," Izuku murmurs. "It's alright. I'm alright."

It takes a few moments for All Might to let go of him. When he does, Izuku looks up and gives the hero what he hopes is a reassuring smile. All Might manages a small smile in return, though Izuku catches the pained look that flashes across All Might's face when he catches sight of the bruises on Izuku's throat. It's only after the hero gives Izuku another once over that he finally turns to the detective that had politely taken a step away to give them some semblance of privacy.

"Tsukauchi," All Might greets. "Thank you for letting me know right away."

"Of course," Tsukauchi nods with a smile. Then his eyes shift to behind them. "Though, it looks like it's time for Midoriya to go."

Izuku turns around to follow Tsukauchi's line of sight to find someone wringing their handkerchief, their eyes wide and form hunched into themselves.

"Mom," he breathes.

Inko doesn't rush to Izuku or immediately hug him like All Might. Instead, the two Midoriya's stop about a step away, facing each other, searching each other's eyes for the answer to their silent questions.

Are you okay?

Is it over?

It's a habit left over from the times when Hisashi would deliver a beating and then leave them battered and bruised in the living room, when neither of them dared speak least the man come back, when

Inko was too afraid to touch Izuku's many wounds and risk worsening his injuries.

Izuku and Inko let their eyes say all the *We're okay,* the *It's over* and the *I am here* they don't need to voice to hear.

(Unnoticed by the two, All Might averts his gaze at the feeling of intruding on something private and intimate.)

Inko swallows thickly. She doesn't speak, her worry and stress possibly making her memories relapse back to the days with Hisashi, but she does untangle her fingers from the handkerchief she'd been wrangling and holds it out to Izuku in a silent offering.

Izuku smiles at her and gratefully lowers his head, letting her tie it around his neck and hide the finger-shaped bruises with a familiarity born through time.

When Izuku straightens up again, Inko nods and takes in a deep breath as if to fortify herself. Then she turns to All Might and Tsukauchi.

"Oh," Izuku jumps. "Um, Mom, this is—"

And... Izuku actually has no idea how to finish that sentence. But the hero in question steps forward, saving Izuku.

"Hello, Midoriya-san," All Might says with a smile on his gaunt face. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm one of young Midoriya's teachers, Yagi Toshinori."

"Oh. Tha, thank you for taking care of Izuku—"

At first, Izuku thought the name must be a pseudonym. But then he catches the way All Might looks over at him while saying the unfamiliar name, and he realizes with a jolt: this is All Might's real name.

All Might just told them his real name.

Yagi Toshinori just told *Izuku* his real name.

Even as Inko softly thanks All Might and the police, Izuku just kind of stares at the hero. Izuku has never even thought to ask All Might his real name, knowing too well how important and secretive it must be. But now, All Might has given it to Izuku without even being asked.

The sheer weight of what All Might trusted them—trusted *him*—with is flattering and staggering at the same time.

He looks up at the hero with wide eyes and All Might gives him a smile that's so unbearably *fond* as he ruffles Izuku's hair one last time before saying their goodbyes.

Izuku and Inko ride quietly in the police car taking them home—Inko calming down from her fright and worry while Izuku is calming down from having his *mind blown*—when a thought occurs to Izuku.

"Oh!" he can't help but say out loud. Inko turns towards him and Sansa—the police officer driving them home—glances at him through the back mirror.

Izuku looks back and forth between them, them shrugs a little helplessly.

"I forgot to ask Shigaraki about that photo."

*

By the time school resumes, everyone in Class 1-A has heard about what happened at the mall. The school decides to change the location for the training camp and keep the location a secret. That draws a few comments from some of their classmates, but personally Shouto doesn't really care.

What he's more focused on is the soft pastel coloured handkerchief tied around Midoriya's neck despite the warm weather.

He can take a wild guess at why.

Once homeroom has ended and they're free to move around, Shouto immediately stands up and makes his way over to Midoriya's desk. Shouto takes the empty seat behind Midoriya as the other boy turns around to face him.

"Here," Shouto offers his own handkerchief. "I cooled it using my quirk. It should help with the bruising."

Midoriya widens his eyes, then smiles ruefully.

“I can’t hide anything from you, can I,” he says while shaking his head. But he takes the handkerchief Shouto is holding out to him without a second thought. “Thank you.”

Midoriya hesitates for a moment before undoing the cloth around his neck, but then moves his fingers swiftly as if to get it over with as quickly as possible. His hair will probably hide the worst of the bruising from most people except Shouto, who is right in front of him.

As the pale cloth slips away Shouto catches sight of the ugly purple finger-shaped bruises wrapped around Midoriya’s throat.

The edge of the chair creaks in Shouto’s clenched hands.

Midoriya quickly ties Shouto’s handkerchief around his neck, then hums in pleasure.

“It does feel better. Thanks again.”

Shouto feels the anger ebb away at Midoriya’s bright smile. He consciously pries his fingers off the chair and brings his hands to lie innocently on top of the desk.

“You know, I’ve realized that you always seem to meet villains when you’re not with me,” he brings up to take his mind off Midoriya’s bruises.

Midoriya raises his eyebrows. “Oh?”

“You got kidnapped by Kurogiri at the USJ after I got separated. You met Stain in Hosu before I found you. You met Shigaraki again when I wasn’t with you at the mall. At this point, it’s becoming a pattern.”

Midoriya bursts out laughing at Shouto’s faux-serious reasoning.

“What are you then, my villain deterrent?”

Shouto grins back.

“Only makes sense, seeing as you’re villain catnip.”

“Hey!”

*

Izuku's collar of bruises have faded by the time the summer training camp rolls around, and boy does it start with a bang. Really, they shouldn't have expected anything else. This is UA after all, and fanboying over the Wild Wild Pussy Cats aside, an actual Forest of Beasts that feels like it's been ripped straight from some video game is definitely *Plus Ultra.*

Some of them, like Izuku or Iida, might have been able to get to the base camp sooner if they'd just run straight past the many obstacles. The beasts are made of dirt, so while they're strong and durable, they aren't that fast. But all of Class 1-A stick together and help each other out, so while they arrive tired and battered and far closer to dinner time than lunch, they arrive together.

"We actually thought it'd take you longer!" Pixie-Bob cackles in a series of mews.

Amongst the chatter, Izuku notices a small child with a horned cap standing in the background with a permanent glare fixed on his face. He was there when the Mandalay and Pixie-Bob first arrived, too. A son or other family member of one of the Pussy Cats, maybe?

Izuku might have asked, if only it weren't for the boy's eyes.

There's a familiar look in those eyes. It's not quite the same, but Izuku has seen something similar in Todoroki, right before they fought at the Spots Festival. He's seen it in Iida, as he left for Hosu.

Izuku can't quite place exactly what it is—hate, rage, hurt, betrayal, bitterness, sadness, *vengeance?*—but it makes him hesitate to approach the boy.

While Izuku has never been able to leave someone in need of help, he's already failed Iida. Now he knows that there are some things that Izuku just doesn't understand, some things that he has to be more careful with. So he needs to be more cautious if he wants to help this kid.

So for now, all Izuku does is keep an eye on the boy as dinner is served to a half-starved (and half-crazed, if you look at Kirishima and Kaminari) Class 1-A.

Once the feeding frenzy has died down, it's time to take a bath. Izuku is looking forward to washing off all the dirt and sweat from the day,

but as soon as he gets a look at the washing facilities he quickly backpedals.

“Huh? Dude, where are you going?” Sero asks when Izuku bumps into him.

“Um. I, uh, need to, um, do something else right now.”

Like avoiding the showers, which are wide open.

Stupid, dumb, idiotic. He should have thought of this. The showers in UA have private stalls so he’s never had this problem, but it looks like here there are no stalls at all. Which means anyone and everyone can see his scars.

“Come on, it can wait till later!” Kirishima says as he slings an arm around Izuku’s shoulders. “There’s a hot spring in the back! That’s gotta feel good after all the exercise today.”

And yeah, that does sound good, and it’d probably be best for his tired muscles, but if you weigh that against everyone seeing his scars...

The weight of Kirishima’s arm suddenly vanishes from Izuku’s shoulders and instead he finds Todoroki by his side.

“Go,” the boy says, subtly jostling Kirishima to the side and protectively herding Izuku away from their well-intentioned classmates. Thankfully the others are too excited about the hot springs to pay them much more attention.

Izuku gives Todoroki a grateful smile.

He’s sorry he had to burden Todoroki with the ugly sight and knowledge of his scars, but he can’t help feeling so *grateful* for his help and relieved that he understands without even a single word having to pass between them.

It’s a novel experience, having someone who knows, understands, and accepts Izuku’s scars. Izuku has done his best to hide them even from his mother, so having this... having *Todoroki* is absolutely wonderous.

Izuku catches Todoroki’s sleeve before he slips out. “Thank you,” he says sincerely.

The corners of Todoroki’s eyes crinkle in a small smile.

Once he’s left behind the excited chatter of the boy’s bath, Izuku

wanders around aimlessly. He needs to kill time until everyone else leaves the baths so he can hopefully at least shower before it's time for bed, but he has no idea what to do or where to go.

He's exploring the layout of the camp when he runs into the boy from earlier.

"Oh," Izuku blinks, then steps to the side. "Sorry—"

"Get out of the way," the kid snaps as he stomps past Izuku. "I can't abide idiots trying to be heroes."

Izuku watches bemusedly as the child storms off.

"Sorry about that," a voice sighs, and Izuku turns to find Mandalay and Pixie-Bob. Mandalay looks off into the direction the boy left, then meets Izuku's eyes with a rueful smile. "That's Kota, my nephew."

"He... doesn't seem to like heroes much," Izuku says hesitantly.

"Kota's parents... Mandalay's cousins. They were pro heroes, and they... died in the line of duty," Pixie-Bob explains in a subdued voice.

Izuku gets to hear about Kota's parents and how it destroyed Kota's world and his notion of heroes.

"...Were they Water Hose, by any chance?" Izuku asks quietly.

Mandalay looks at him with surprised eyes that quickly turn sombre. "Yes. Were you a fan, to come up with them so quickly?"

"...Something like that." Izuku is a fan of heroes in general, and he's heard the tragic news of the duo with water quirks. But he never thought he'd meet their son and see the impact their actions had on the young boy.

It's... *strange* isn't the right word for it, but... he feels something, hearing about a viewpoint that's so different from his own. For all of Izuku's life, he's looked up to heroes. So did most, if not all, of the other children he knew. But in Kota's case, not only did he lose his parents to heroism, but for everyone to praise something that's so devastating for him...

In the end, Izuku can't say anything.

He thanks Mandalay and Pixie-Bob for telling him, then bids them good night.

He's still deep in thought when Todoroki finds him and finally shakes him out of his musing.

"Hey," the other boy greets him, hair still damp. "You can go in now. The others have all left the baths."

Izuku blinks in surprise, clearing his head to focus on Todoroki. "Already?"

"The water of the hot spring cooled for some reason. It should be back to the normal temperature by now, though."

Izuku gives Todoroki a suspicious look. *"Riiiight.* And you wouldn't have anything to do with this mysterious phenomenon, would you, Mr. Half-Cold Half-Hot?"

Todoroki, to his credit, keeps a straight face. "Of course not."

Izuku snorts and shakes his head, and Todoroki's impassive facade breaks into a small grin.

"How would I do without you," Izuku huffs in laughter.

"Fairly well, I should think," Todoroki returns without missing a beat even as he gently pushes Izuku towards the baths. "Go. You still have enough time to take a bath before bed."

"Yes, yes, might as well make the most of it since you kicked everyone else out."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Of course not," Izuku chuckles. "...But, Todoroki?"

"Yes?"

He turns to look Todoroki in the eye. Mismatched eyes stare down at him, and Izuku can't help the smile (softer than the humour that had been there a moment ago) that blossoms on his face.

"Thanks. Really. For... everything."

Todoroki looks at him for a long moment before replying.

"...Don't mention it."

(Because you've already given me much, much, more.)

*

The next day, after going through the absolute hellscape of training their quirks, Class 1-A is tasked with making curry for their own dinner. With Iida interpreting the task as yet another part of their training and hyping everyone up to make the "tastiest curry in the world," everyone slowly revives from the gruelling training and start to regain their cheer.

"Hey! Fire duo! Can we get some fire over here?" Ashido calls.

Izuku blinks, then glances over at Todoroki.

Fire duo? he mouths incredulously at the other boy. Todoroki's eyes sparkle with humour.

"I'll take care of it," he says and walks over to where Uraraka and Ashido are struggling to light the cooking fire. He lights it up in a blaze, and Izuku catches the small smile that graces Todoroki's face as he gazes into the flames.

He's already seen Todoroki use his fire against Stain, but it lightens Izuku's heart to see further proof that his friend is healing.

Izuku turns away in higher spirits to help the others with the cooking. When the curry is almost done, Izuku finds Sato frowning at the simmering pot with the salt shaker in his hand.

"Something wrong?" Izuku asks.

"It's just, we're not sure if we should put in more salt or not."

Jiro nods from beside him. "When I tasted it, it was too hot to really tell— whoa, Midoriya! I just said it's too hot!"

"Did you burn yourself? Do you need water?" Sato worries.

Izuku blinks with the ladel in his hand, having just scooped up a bit of curry and tasted it. But then he grins and sticks out his tongue to show that he's fine.

"It's a side effect of my quirk," he explains. "My mouth is fireproof, so I can eat hot things without burning myself. The curry's fine, by the

way."

"Aw, I'm so jealous," Jiro groans. "I always burn my tongue eating or drinking hot stuff. That's *so* useful."

And... Izuku has never thought of it that way. This trait had come from Hisashi, after all, the most damning evidence of their connection. But, like Todoroki said, it's *his* power, not his father's.

So Izuku just smiles.

"Yes. I suppose it is."

Soon enough the curry is prepared, and dinner is a rowdy event in true Class 1-A fashion. But Izuku notices Kota turning away from them with a scoff, not even bothering to pick up a plate for himself.

He frowns. Giving Kota space is one thing, but knowingly letting the boy starve himself? Izuku can take a guess as to why Kota refuses to eat—if his hate for heroes is anything to go by, he probably doesn't want to eat anything made by "idiot" hero aspirants—but missing meals at that age isn't good.

Izuku would know.

So he starts speed eating through his plate of curry and ladles some rice and curry on a new plate, shaking his head to his friends when they look up questioningly at him. Best not to overwhelm Kota. He follows Kota's footprints to a cliff overlooking the forest with an entrance to a cave to find the boy sitting on the ledge.

A soft growl emits from Kota's stomach, though the boy just hunches in on himself and refuses to acknowledge it.

Izuku shakes his head.

"I brought a plate of curry," he calls, stepping into view. Kota jumps up.

"You... how did you find me?!" the boy nearly shouts.

"I followed your footprints," Izuku answers honestly. Then he offers the plate of food. "I know you don't like us, but you don't have to punish your own body because of that."

"I don't want it!" Kota growls, and his stomach growls too as if on cue. The boy blushes, but stubbornly glares at Izuku and doesn't move to

take the plate. “Get away from my secret base. I don’t want to fraternize with people like you, always going on about quirks, flaunting it…”

When Izuku stays silent for a moment, not sure how to respond, Kota seems to gain momentum and continues speaking.

“You’re all freaking crazy, calling yourselves ‘heroes’ or ‘villains’ and going off killing each other like idiots. Showing off quirks are all you care about,” the boy vents, as if he needs to get it off his chest.

Izuku is pretty sure Kota isn’t even mad at *him,* not really. His anger has more to do with heroes, quirks, and the super-powered society in general. Izuku has no idea how to even *start* unpacking everything Kota has on his chest.

As if Izuku’s silence unnerves him, Kota rounds on Izuku again.

“What’s your problem? If you’re done, then get out!”

Izuku bites the inside of his cheek (memories of how *badly* he’d failed Iida making him cautious, but also unable to stop from at least trying to help) and speaks in a low voice.

“I… won’t pretend to understand,” he says slowly, and Kota blinks as if that’s not what he’s used to hearing, not what he expected. “But I just want you to know… I used to hate my quirk too.”

Kota looks truly unbalanced now, and he’s looking up at Izuku with confusion.

“But… you’re using your quirk now to be a hero,” he says in an almost accusing voice.

A corner of Izuku’s lips quirks up. “I am. It was someone with a quirk that made me hate it in the first place, but another person with a quirk saved me.”

Kota looks up at him with a look that suggests he has no idea what to make of Izuku, and frankly, Izuku himself isn’t sure what he’s trying to say either. So he just shakes his head in self-deprecation and sets the plate down on a flat rock.

“Just… keep that in mind. And don’t starve yourself because of us. I’ll leave you now.”

And then he turns his back and leaves without a backwards glance, hoping Kota will eat once he's sure he's alone.

Thoughts of Kota nag Izuku through the rest of the evening, and he ends up lying awake long past the time everyone else has passed out. He listens to the breathing, snoring, and occasional mumbling of his classmates before sighing and getting up to quietly tip-toe out.

Izuku ends up in a room by the kitchens, sitting next to the windowsill and looking out.

He doesn't know how much time has passed when he looks up to the sound of footsteps.

"...Midoriya?" Todoroki calls, his voice slow and thick with sleep.

"Todoroki," Izuku smiles as he turns to face his friend. Todoroki is standing by the doorway, squinting at him with slightly bleary eyes. "What's wrong?"

"...Why are you here?" Todoroki asks instead of answering.

Izuku shrugs a little helplessly.

"I'm a light sleeper, and I had... some things on my mind." He pauses, then adds. "Don't worry, I'll be fine. But you should get more sleep."

Todoroki stands there watching Izuku for another long moment before he wordlessly turns and leaves. Izuku goes back to looking out the window.

But then, he hears familiar footsteps approaching once more.

Izuku turns to find that Todoroki has returned with a mug in each hand. He sits down next to Izuku wordlessly before concentrating on the mugs in his hands that are filled with—milk, Izuku finds as he peers over Todoroki's shoulder. A faint glow emits from Todoroki's left palm, and soon enough the milk is steaming.

Todoroki hands the warm mug to Izuku.

"Here," he says, and when Izuku takes the mug he puts his left hand on the other mug and heats it too.

"That's so cool!" Izuku says excitedly. "You've got to teach me how to do that."

Todoroki snorts softly into his milk. “Maybe later. We’re already doing enough training as it is, and you’re supposed to be resting. For now, drink up.”

Izuku does as he’s told, and sighs in content as the milk fills his body with warmth. It may be summer, but nights in these mountains can still get a little chilly.

“You’re going to spoil me rotten,” he complains half-heartedly.

Todoroki just hums, but Izuku is sure there’s a smile hidden behind the rim of his mug.

“So,” the boy starts, and he looks much more alert and awake now. “What’s on your mind?”

Izuku smiles, reminded a little of how their conversation began at the hospital in Hosu. (Though he’s *never* going to forget how it ended.)

“It’s just… Kota. The little kid,” he elaborates when Todoroki doesn’t seem to recognize the name. “He has a grudge against heroes and quirks. The super-powered society in general, really. He’s hurting, and I… I have no idea how to help him.”

He slumps a little.

“If it was something physical, I could fight it off. But it’s not, and I’m basically a stranger to him, so I don’t have any right or any sway. I know that, but I can’t help but want to… help.”

Todoroki shakes his head and lets out a huff that might be a sigh or a chuckle.

“Of course you do.”

He taps a finger against his mug. “I’d say not to worry about it too much. He’s different from me or Iida,” he says this with a wry smile, “and like you pointed out, he doesn’t know you. You don’t know him. It might be best not to butt into it.”

“Yeah… you’re right,” Izuku concedes.

It’s strange. Nothing’s been resolved, really, but talking to Todoroki has made him feel better for some inexplicable reason.

They sit in companionable silence for a while before Izuku drains the rest of his warm milk and gets up.

“Alright, I’m done moping. We should get back to bed. Thanks for sitting through it with me,” he grins as he offers a hand to Todoroki.

The other boy takes the hand and lets Izuku pull him up, the smile gracing his face much more prominent when it’s just the two of them than when other people are around.

“Any time,” he says simply, and the sincerity in his words takes Izuku’s breath away for a moment. Izuku’s hand tightens before he lets go.

They walk back together, shoulder to shoulder, happy and content in each other’s presence.

*

But they should have known better.

Because life isn’t fair, and it certainly isn’t kind.

And on a cliff overlooking the forest, a villain with unruly black hair and a fire quirk watches the camp.

A wide grin splits his face.

Chapter End Notes

I have nothing to say except

IZUKU HEADBANG

Into the Fire

Chapter Notes

I completely forgot to mention this in the last chapter, but Akemi831Sato added BYW to the BNHA fanfic recommendation page on TV tropes! I'm told BYW doesn't have a page for itself yet and is just on the recommendation list, and I'm honestly not sure how that site even works, but thank you regardless.

And despite this being a quick update, we still have new fanart!!! (sobs with joy and gratitude)
The Icecream Breakout by baisleyarts: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/180496946864/baisleyarts-so-ive-found-a-wonderful-gem-in
TodoDeku angel fight scene (I need to come up with a better name for that) by bosephine-lulu: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/180544688519/bosephine-lulu-not-a-just-quarter-not-a-just
and by random-fandork: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/180598350794/midoriya-grins-the-flames-flickering-behind-him
Thank you all so very much.

And as for this chapter... well. Here's your fire.
I regret everything and nothing at the same time.
_(:3」∠)_

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On the evening of the third day of the training camp, the students are treated to the recreation event ‘the Test of Courage’ where each class gets a chance to use their quirks to try to scare the other class and make them (to borrow Tiger’s words) “piss their pants.”

Unfortunately, the people in the remedial group (Ashido, Kaminari, Sato, and Kirishima) have to be quite literally tied up and dragged away by Aizawa for extra lessons, and their wailing lamentations echo sadly throughout the forest.

With the four of them gone, that still leaves fifteen people in Class 1-A to divide into pairs, and it’s inevitable that one person is left on their

own.

It's Aoyama that draws the short stick.

The boy's lower lip quivers even as he valiantly tries to keep up his signature smile, but even his sparkles seem to dim and tremble at the mere *thought* of having to go through the dark, spooky forest on his own.

Izuku, on the other hand, is paired with Bakugo.

Bakugo huffs when he sees their matching numbers.

"You'd better not slow me down, nerd."

Izuku grins brightly at his childhood friend.

"Sure, Kacchan!"

Some of their classmates are shaking their heads at Izuku and Bakugo's seemingly disjointed exchange, but Izuku understands Bakugo just fine, so.

When their turn arrives, Izuku and Bakugo set out fairly calmly despite the screams they hear in the distance. And when the first scare that Class 1-B prepared tries to startle them in the form of a girl's head popping up out of the ground, Bakugo only lets out a disinterested "Oh" while Izuku drops on his knees to look at her more closely.

"This is incredible!" Izuku gushes at the girl's thoroughly bemused head. "Does your quirk let you phase through things? Can you dig holes? Or is it just your head that's here? Is it a fake head? Is it an illusion? What—"

"Deku," Bakugo interrupts, suddenly looking highly entertained. "I think you broke her."

And sure enough, the girl is gaping at Izuku, looking bewildered and wind-swept at having Izuku gush at her instead of screaming in fright like expected. The head works her jaw for a moment more before disappearing as if running away.

"Oops," Izuku says sheepishly as he gets up from the ground and dusts himself off. "I guess I shouldn't have done that."

"Nah," Bakugo snickers. "Did you see her *face?* Keep that up, and this just might turn out to be fun after all.

And so they continue like that, Izuku gushing and speculating about the quirks of Class B every time someone tries to scare them, and Bakugo getting a kick out of their bewildered expressions before they flee from Izuku's passionate theorizing.

When Ragdoll meets them at the midpoint, her eyes are dancing with laughter.

"It's not even your turn to start scaring Class B, and you've already gotten to work!" she cackles. Of course, with her search quirk, she would have seen every interaction. The hero gives them their name tags and waves them off with a merry call that she'll be looking forward to seeing how they scare Class B when it's actually their turn.

But before Izuku and Bakugo can make it to the finish line, Mandalay's telepathy rings in their minds.

<Everyone!>

Both Izuku and Bakugo stop still at the urgency in her voice. But what comes next goes beyond what either of them could have imagined.

<We're under attack by two villains who claim they're from the League! And there may be more out there!>

"What?!" Izuku gasps. "How did they find—"

<Everyone who's out there, get to camp at once! If you encounter an enemy, don't engage! Just retreat!>

Izuku and Bakugo look at each other—Izuku's eyes opened wide and Bakugo's narrowed to slits—when Mandalay's last message rings through their minds.

<And... if *anyone* knows where Kota is, please bring him back! I don't, I *don't know* where he is, and I can't go looking for him right now. Just... please. Don't try to fight anyone, just find him and bring him back!>

Izuku freezes. Kota. If even Mandalay doesn't know where he is, that means he's probably at his secret base. His *secret* base that not even his aunt knows about. Izuku is probably the only one who knows where Kota is right now. And the base is far away enough from the camp to be a risk for the boy to try to get through the forest alone when there may be villains about.

Kota's in danger.

Izuku has to get to him as soon as possible.

With Full Cowl, he can speed to Kota. But then Bakugo won't be able to keep up. But Izuku can't just *leave* Bakugo, not when there may be hostiles near them this very minute, but Kota—

"Shut the fuck up, you stupid nerd," Bakugo growls, and Izuku clicks his mouth shut after having realized that he's been muttering out loud. Izuku looks at Bakugo uncertainly.

Bakugo meets his eyes squarely.

"Go."

His simple word (and his simple *trust)* takes Izuku's breath away for a second. But soon he too hardens his determination, deciding to trust Bakugo on his own.

"Here," Izuku pulls out his phone and extends it to the other boy. "There's a number under *The Sun,* contact him and let him know that the League is here. He *has* to know as soon as possible."

Izuku would do it himself, but he can't afford to look at his phone and be distracted if he wants to get to Kota at his max speed. Thankfully Izuku had put All Might's number under a pseudonym all those months ago, so hopefully, the blonde won't figure out the hero's identity.

"Tch," Bakugo tsks, but he takes Izuku's phone without complaint or even question. Izuku knows that's an affirmative.

"Stay safe, Kacchan," he nods before he lights up with Full Cowl.

Bakugo scoffs at Izuku's concern, but Izuku is already gone before he can hear his response.

Please let me not be late, Izuku begs some unknown being as he rushes through the forest. *Not like last time. Not like Iida.*

He pumps out Full Cowl to its limit, the percentage of One For All edging closer to passing his five percent limit and straining his bones. But Izuku can't stop. Not with the heavy and familiar feeling of dread in his gut.

And when he finally clears the forest and catches sight of the small

cliff, Izuku's heart almost stops.

A giant cloaked figure is standing in front of Kota. And as Izuku watches, he takes a massive swing as if to squash the child.

Izuku remembers Stain bringing down the blade on Iida's neck.

And just—

No.

Not this time.

Izuku *pushes* fire behind him to boost his speed while *pulling* Kota towards him. The boy is light, which means he practically flies into Izuku's waiting arms and they tumble across the stone ledge due to their momentum.

Kota has been protected by Izuku's body, so he springs up as soon as they stop rolling and gapes at Izuku.

"You...? Why are you—"

"Hm?" another voice interrupts. Izuku quickly regains his balance and stands in a defensive pose in front of Kota, facing the villain. But as soon as he properly lays eyes on the giant man, Izuku recognizes him.

The hulking man is enveloped in a large black cloak, but his hood has been pulled down to reveal his face. A large scar spans from his left forehead to the corner of his mouth, and a grotesque artificial eye glares out of a too-wide socket.

It's Muscular, the villain who killed Kota's parents.

And judging by Kota's tear-stained face, he knows it too.

Of all the villains that might be here, it had to be Muscular. Of all the people he could have found, it had to be Kota.

Life isn't fair. *And it certainly isn't kind.*

Muscular seems oblivious to their turmoil as he peers at Izuku.

"You're the one in the photo," he says, and yeah, *thanks* for the confirmation. "Midoriya, was it?"

"Muscular," Izuku bites back tersely, and for some reason the villain

looks delighted at Izuku's recognition.

Instead of humouring the villain, Izuku glances behind him and catches Kota's tearful eyes.

He can only imagine what the boy must be going through right now.

So Izuku plants himself firmly between Kota and the villain, shielding him from view, and promises him with everything he has.

"It's alright, Kota. I promise. I'll protect you." No, more than that. "I will *save* you."

The boy looks up at him with wide eyes. Izuku gives him the most reassuring smile he can manage before turning his attention back to Muscular.

The villain laughs as if Izuku has just made a joke.

"'I'll save you'? Spoken like a true budding hero, I see. You lot are always going on about justice and what not. Ooh, it's tempting, but I'm not allowed to kill you… *yet.* So tell me. Do you know where a brat called Bakugo is?"

And that brings Izuku up short.

Kacchan? They want *Kacchan?*

Izuku had just been with Bakugo. But he'd left him. He'd left him to fend for himself against who knows how many villains without even the knowledge that he's their target.

Izuku *left him.*

"Why?" he bites out, guilt and horror rising like bile in the back of his throat. "Why do you want him? Why are you here? Who even *is* here?"

The villain grins, and it truly is a terrifying sight.

"We," he gloats, "are the Vanguard Action Squad of the League of Villains."

That confirms Mandalay's message. But a Vanguard Action Squad? Did the League get new recruits? …Did what Izuku said to Shigaraki have an impact on this?

“But as for why they want the brat, who knows? Who cares. I just want to have some *fun.* And hey... I can’t kill you, but no one said anything about *playing* with you. How about I beat the information out of you?”

And with that, Muscular whips off his cloak. Tendrils of what looks like muscle fibre wrap over his already bulging right arm.

“Show me blood!” he leers and leaps at Izuku.

Izuku raises his guard with Full Cowl anchoring him. He could have just *pulled* himself away, but then Kota would have been in danger since the boy is standing right behind him, and—

BOOM!

“—?!”

Izuku chokes as the air is punched out of his lungs. He’s— he’s been shot into the side of the cliff, his left arm has been butchered by taking just that one single blow, Muscular tore through Full Cowl like it’s *nothing*—

“What’s the matter?” the villain taunts. Izuku just barely manages to bring himself together in time to dodge the second blow. “Didn’t you say you’re going to save him?”

Izuku grits his teeth. His mind is in overdrive. He forces himself to push away thoughts of Bakugo for the moment. The most important thing right now is getting Kota to safety, but Muscular won’t let them go easily. His former words about beating Bakugo’s location out of Izuku is probably just an excuse; he just wants to *play*.

Izuku’s specialty is quirk analysis, and he *knows,* just from that one blow, that the meagre 5% of One For All he can handle is nowhere near enough to combat Muscular’s quirk. But he can’t afford to use 100% and break himself and risk leaving Kota unprotected when there may be other villains in wait.

Muscular is the superior version of Izuku in a different way than Stain was. If Stain had been the better, more experienced, more tactical version of Izuku’s fighting style, then Muscular is simply faster, stronger, *crueller*.

But One For All isn’t all that Izuku has up his sleeve.

A small jet of water hits Muscular in the back of his head, making him turn his attention from Izuku.

Kota stands with his arm outstretched and tears in his eyes.

“Water Hose... Mom and Dad... did you torture and kill them like that too...?!”

“Oho...? Are you their kid? This must be fate!” Muscular laughs.

Izuku takes the moment Muscular is distracted by Kota to prepare himself for his next move.

But he can’t help but notice what Kota had said.

Did you torture and kill them like that too?

As if Izuku is already dead.

And Izuku realizes once more that Aizawa was right. Izuku isn’t like All Might. He can’t reassure anyone just by his mere presence. What’s more, he’s already been injured and thrown around in front of Kota. Despite having promised to save him, Izuku can’t even reassure Kota properly.

Kota has already lost his parents and his faith in heroes.

Izuku can’t add more to the weight and horror this child is carrying by dying in front of him.

He will, he *must* fulfill his promise.

Even if he has to *burn*.

So with that thought, he lets the burning inferno simmering under his skin *push* out. The sudden burst of flames howling behind him makes Muscular pause before he can reach Kota, and both the villain and the boy look at Izuku with wide eyes.

A burning pillar of brilliant fire claws its way high into the night sky, blazing away like a beacon. Izuku stands in the centre of it, almost too bright to see.

But his voice carries clearly above the roar of fire.

“It’s alright, Kota. You... *we’ll* be alright.”

His eyes burn with promise.

“I am here.”

*

Aizawa’s head snaps up. There. Across the forest, he can just barely spot a sliver of vertical fire blazing in the distance that’s different from the forest fire. It’s a beacon, a marking, a call.

It’s a distress signal.

And Aizawa knows *exactly* who it’s from.

“Always trying to help others. But can you really afford to be distracted, hero?” the dark-haired villain taunts as his quirk produces yet more fire.

If Aizawa had been in a hurry before, it’s *nothing* compared to what he feels now. He almost snarls as his eyes glow red.

“Out of my way, villain.”

*

“Deku,” Uraraka breathes as her eyes catch sight of the beacon blazing through the trees. “Tsuyu, I know we were told to get to camp, but Deku needs help—”

“It’s so beautiful, isn’t it?” an unfamiliar girl’s voice interrupts.

Uraraka and Asui whirl around to find a girl wearing an unfamiliar uniform. The girl puts both her hands to her flushed cheeks, though most of her face is covered by a strange mask. Her eyes are dreamy and almost dazed as she gazes at the pillar of fire in the distance.

“He’s so beautiful. Especially when he’s bruised and battered and bloody. Oh, I’m so *jealous* of whoever’s there!” she pouts. Then she turns to face the two bewildered girls with an eerie glint in her eyes.

“But I think *we* can be great friends too, right?”

*

“We talked about this just a few days ago, he *always* meets villains when I’m not with him, I should *never* have let him out of my sight—”

“Todoroki! Calm down!”

Shouto takes in a sharp breath at Yaoyorozu’s plea, then lets it out in a frustrated sigh.

“…I’m sorry,” he grits out.

But the other girl is already shaking her head.

“Your worry is understandable. But we must stay calm, especially in situations like this.”

“Right.” Shouto sighs. He’s usually good at keeping a cool head, but more and more often, he finds himself losing his composure when Midoriya is concerned. Like the other boy had pointed out, half of him is fire, after all.

But the other half is still ice, and he can draw on that fridged sharpness to focus on helping Midoriya.

“I’m going after him,” Shouto says in a tone that brooks no argument. Yaoyorozu frowns a little, as if she wants to protest, but perhaps she senses his iron will as she doesn’t even try to dissuade him. Instead, she swiftly makes a few gas masks and hands them to Shouto.

“Take these, then, and give them to whoever you meet on the way. I’ll go find Class B and help them since they seem to be closer to the source of the gas. And remember, Mandalay told us not to engage.”

“Of course. Thank you,” Shouto says, and he doesn’t just mean the masks.

Yaoyorozu gives him a tight smile.

“You aren’t the only one worried about him, Todoroki. Bring him back safe.”

Shouto nods. And with that, they take off in opposite directions.

*

Muscular is momentarily distracted by the blazing fire, and Izuku wastes no time in capitalizing on it. He doesn't have his phone and can't send a message to anyone, so he hopes someone will see his signal flare and come. But if Mandalay is too busy to even look for Kota, then Izuku knows that he can't count on it, not when there are other villains on the loose. At the very least, now other people know where he is, so there's a chance that someone can come get Kota if Izuku... if Izuku fails. But for now, he has to fight.

He tries to *pull* the man away from Kota, but the villain doesn't even budge. Izuku grits his teeth. The only other instance something had flat out *resisted* against his pull was the Nomu at the USJ, which only proves Izuku's theory that Muscular's strength is on an entirely different level than Izuku's.

A different approach, then.

"You wanted to play?" Izuku grits out, reminded of Shigaraki's childlike glee and malevolence. Is that all villains ever think about? I that all it is to them? A game? "Fine, I'll *play* with you."

Muscular grins in a truly terrifying way, but he turns away from Kota to fully face Izuku, just as he'd intended.

"Then show me blood!" the villain shouts as he launches himself at Izuku.

He's ridiculously fast, more like a rampaging boar than Stain's snakelike precision, and Izuku just barely manages to *pull* himself between Muscular's legs and get behind him. He throws a punch powered with Full Cowl, but it barely even sinks through the first layer of protruding muscle fibre.

"What was that?" Muscular laughs. "You've got speed, I'll give you that, but you lack firepower."

"Oh, I'll give you *firepower,"* Izuku grits out with a grimace.

And with that, he *pushes.*

Flames burst out of the hand he has on Muscular, rapidly enveloping the man from their point of contact, crawling over him and eating away at the layers of muscle and flesh with a frightening fervour.

Muscular *howls.*

“Get it off! Stop... I’ll make you *bleed* for that!”

His scream of pain turns into a roar of rage.

Izuku grits his teeth against the bile that rises at the familiar smell of burnt flesh, dodging away from Muscular’s flailing limbs. The villain is being smart, though, and covers the burning fibres with more muscle. With no oxygen to fuel it, the fire is quickly snuffed out.

But Izuku’s gamble has at least partly worked. The muscles on the villain’s right arm that he’d managed to burn aren’t regenerating as quickly. Muscular has to stretch the fibres from his left arm to cover them, and it doesn’t look like it’ll be as effective.

He quickly starts formulating the base of a plan. Fire seems to work pretty well, so if Izuku can burn enough of the muscles, just enough that the villain can't use his enhanced speed, then he can take Kota and run—

But before he can execute the plan, Muscular glares at Izuku. He rummages through his pockets, glass eyes falling out carelessly.

“You little shit,” he snarls, finally picking out one eye and settling it in his socket. “I’m not allowed to kill you, but for that, I’ll leave you *begging* for death.”

And instead of charging at Izuku as he expected, he whirls around.

Izuku is confused for a split second—is he running away?—before he realizes.

He’s going after Kota.

And at that— all thought seems to freeze. Izuku doesn’t think, he just reacts, and shoots forward with Full Cowl and his pull.

But it looks like that’s exactly what Muscular wanted.

“Of course you’d react like that if I went for the brat!” he crows in

victory, and even through the chaos Izuku realizes what that implies: that Muscular has used civilians as bait enough times for him to be able to anticipate exactly how Izuku or any hero would have acted.

The man catches Izuku's torso, muscle fibres wrapping around him in an iron grip. Izuku chokes, though he pushes fire onto the man's hand. Muscular howls in pain but doesn't let go until he's dragged Izuku to the hole in the side of the cliff—the small cave Tokoyami had been training with Dark Shadow in—and throws him inside.

Izuku is disoriented for a moment by the sudden darkness and the ringing from hitting his head against the stone floor, but Muscular's crazed voice still reaches his ears.

"You're tough, right? You'll survive a little cave in, right? You won't be able to use fire in there. Stay there for a bit while I kill the brat and get the others."

And Izuku's eyes have just barely managed to adjust when he sees Muscular at the entrance of the cave. The villain raises his bulging arm, layers upon layers of muscle wrapped around it, and *smashes* the side of the cliff.

The small niche caves in, bringing the tip of the mountain down on Izuku.

Part of a startled yelp leaves Izuku's mouth before it's *crushed* out of him, stone falling down and pinning him to the ground, dirt pressing down from all sides.

The rumbling and shaking die down quickly enough, and only then does Izuku realize what's happened.

Muscular threw him inside the cave and brought it down on him.

He's trapped in a cave-in.

He has a *fucking mountain* on top of him.

Oh *shit.*

Panic sets in like never before. Izuku knows, in the back of his mind, that it isn't actually the whole mountain and just the highest tip that's on top of him, and he vaguely registers that there's some kind of structure—a metal chair or table?—that's keeping the worst of the weight off of him. But there's still *part of a mountain* crushing him,

he's practically already in a grave with a mountain of a tombstone on him, and he can't move, he can't see, he can't breathe, he can't— he *can't*—

"Get, get away from me! Don't come any closer!"

The muffled voice of Kota breaks through Izuku's panicked thoughts. The only sense left to him seems to be hearing (and pain, pain pain pain pain *pain)* and through the darkness he hears Kota's desperate cries and Muscular's sadistic laugh.

And suddenly, Izuku isn't trapped in a cave-in anymore, but in a broom cupboard.

He had been locked in that broom cupboard so many times, just like this, listening to Inko's stifled cries and Hisashi's cruel violence.

Izuku had hated that cupboard.

He hadn't really been claustrophobic, but he had hated the sheer helplessness it had stood for. Being locked up meant that he couldn't stop Hisashi, that he couldn't help his mother, that she didn't even want his help, that she didn't even think he could help. He had been so terribly helpless. He had been so, so, *terribly* afraid that Inko would die while Izuku was locked away in that cupboard.

The same fear clutches his heart now.

Even with part of a *mountain* weighing down on him, the most prominent thought echoing in the mess of Izuku's mind suddenly changes from *I don't want to die* to *not Kota.*

His fear *for* someone has always been greater than his fear *of* someone or something, after all. And Kota needs him. Kota *needs* him. Izuku *promised* he'd save him.

So Izuku shoves aside all his panic and fear and latches onto the need to *save.*

But. He tries to get up. He can't. He pushes his arms under his chest. The rubble above doesn't give an inch. He gulps against the pressure on his lungs. He can't *breathe.*

They were at the top of the cliff so there should only be the highest tip of the mountain on top of Izuku, a few boulders maybe. But it's still enough to crush him and flatten him like a bug and squeeze the air

out of his lungs. He gulps and pants, tries to push back with Full Cowl, but it's not enough.

He's not enough.

...But *fuck* that, Izuku's never been enough to save Inko, and he's done with it, done with not being enough, he is not going to sit by helplessly while he listens to the cries of innocents again, he is going to save Kota even if he *burns* himself to the ground.

Sorry, sensei, he thinks a fleeting apology to Aizawa before he ditches Full Cowl and just starts pumping the raw power of One For All into his arms. 5%, 20%, 50%, 100%, beyond, *more,* he just keeps going and going and going.

If Full Cowl isn't enough, if One For All's 100% isn't enough, then Izuku will go further and beyond. *Plus Ultra.* Because fuck logic; Izuku has always been at his strongest when he has someone to protect.

"Come on," he snarls at himself. "You promised to save him, you promised to be a hero, get up, *get up—"*

His arms feel like they're shattering into a thousand pieces and something snaps above his back, but Izuku doesn't stop. He can't stop. Tears stream down his face and pain blossoms through his body but he grits his teeth and bears it. His mind grasps for something, anything, that will give him the push he needs right now, and voices come to him, whispering like beacons of light in the hopeless darkness that's crushing him.

I am and will always be ***so proud*** *of you.*

You did good.

You're a star. And some stars...

"We call them *suns,"* Izuku whispers. *The Sun.* Everything he ever tried to be. Bright and warm and burning. With pull and push and strength. *Brilliant* as it burns itself out.

He chokes on a sob. *Sorry, Mom. Sorry, Eraserhead. Sorry, All Might.*

...Thank you, Shouto.

And a star bursts into a thousand pieces.

And when he emerges from the shattered pieces, he does what he's always done when he's found a tormentor and a victim.

He steps between them.

*

The sound of a pebble rolling distracts Muscular from the kid. He turns around, only to find that the giant mound of rubble he'd brought down on Midoriya is motionless.

He scoffs. Of course it is. Not even Muscular himself would be able to get out of that, though with any luck, the kid will at least still be breathing by the time they dig him up. The others in the League will *flip* if he accidentally killed Midoriya.

Oh well. Midoriya looked tough. He'll probably be able to at least stay alive for a few more minutes. Compress can get the landslide off him. As long as he's still breathing, Muscular can plead innocent that he wasn't trying to disobey orders, just trying to... pin him down.

He's just about to go back to toying with Water Hose's kid when this time, he sees it for certain.

The mound shifts.

"What...?" Muscular fully turns to the cave-in, sure his eyes are playing tricks on him. But no, the stray pieces of scattered pebbles are rattling and the giant mound is trembling.

And then the whole thing *explodes,* shattering boulders and stone like glass, and Muscular shields his face against the flying pieces of debris.

Before he can even lower his arm, a shadow looms over him.

He raises his eyes to find Midoriya, his eyes wide and wild with a burning light, fire spread like wings at his back.

"How—?!" Muscular gapes. "I dropped a *mountain* on you—"

But before he can even react, Midoriya wordlessly draws back a bloody arm. And when he brings it down, it *smashes* into Muscular's face with a burst of flame.

The last thing he sees is brilliant, bright, burning fire.

And then all he sees is black.

*

Kota watches disbelievingly at the figure before him.

Midoriya is standing, *just barely,* bruised and bloody and broken. Both his arms are a horrifying mess, his entire shirt has been torn off, and there's blood and bruises everywhere. He's panting heavily and it looks like he might fall over at any moment.

But he doesn't.

He stands in front of Muscular's defeated body, firmly placing himself between the villain and Kota from the moment he miraculously emerged from the mound that Kota was sure was going to be his grave.

But he's here, and he's alive, and now he's turning to face Kota.

Green eyes focus on him with an intensity that has Kota gulping. And then he says—

"Are you alright?"

And that— *that's* the first thing he says?! Kota can't— Kota can't *believe* this guy, how— why—

"Why?" he chokes out aloud. "You could have just run away without me. You don't even *know* me, and you got this hurt for me. Why...?"

But Midoriya just blinks. And then, he smiles.

"Because you needed help. And that's what heroes do."

Heroes.

And Kota finally understands.

Heroes, like his Mom and Dad.

A hero, like Midoriya.

My hero.

*

Izuku watches as Kota's eyes fill with tears. He's not sure what exactly the emotion behind them is—fear, relief, both, something more?—but he crouches down in front of the child, hoping his presence will bring him some comfort.

"Hey," he calls softly, "it's alright. You're safe now. We both are."

"I'm sorry," the boy suddenly bursts out, reaching out to clutch the hem of Izuku's pants. "You got this hurt for me. I'm so *sorry."*

And those words make Izuku *ache.*

Not only does it hit Izuku personally, but no one should apologize for being rescued, especially not a child.

Aizawa's lesson has never hit harder.

"...Don't be," Izuku manages to say. Don't be sorry, Kota, Mom, what I wanted you to say was—

Kota looks up at him. Maybe the boy sees something in Izuku's expression because he bites his trembling lip, but then, he says—

"Then... *thank you."*

And with those two words, everything becomes *worth it.*

Izuku's eyes widen. And then he *smiles,* bright and happy despite the situation and his injuries. Kota looks taken back by the sheer joy in Izuku's expression, and Izuku laughs out loud.

Though he soon winces when that makes his ribs hurt.

Yeah. Laughing probably isn't the smartest idea when he's just been crushed under boulders.

"Come on," he tells Kota instead. "Muscular's out cold right now, but we should get away from him as soon as possible. And I need to alert the others about the League's target."

Kota gives him a wild look and furiously shakes the hem of Izuku's pants.

"Are you *crazy?!* Can you even *move?"*

Izuku finds himself grinning again because, for all his seemingly insulting words, there's a genuine concern for him in Kota's voice that hadn't been there in the beginning.

"Don't worry. My arms may be messed up, but I saved my legs. As long as you hang onto me properly, I can get you to safety."

He lowers his head a little to meet Kota's eyes.

"I promised I'd save you, and I will."

Kota looks up at him with wide eyes. But unlike before, this time, he tentatively nods.

"I believe you."

There's a kind of fragile but unquestioning faith there, like a bird that's just hatched, something precious and to be protected.

It makes Izuku's heart clench.

He turns his back to Kota so the boy can clamber onto him, but instead of doing so, Kota gasps. Izuku looks over his shoulder to find that Kota is staring at his back in horror.

"Your back..."

Oh. Izuku internally winces. His shirt had been shredded in the cave-in and the following burst of One For All, and now the scars on his arms, the scars on his chest, the scars on his *back* are bare for the boy to see.

Izuku gives Kota a helpless smile over his shoulder.

"Keep this a secret for me?"

Kota's bottom lip wobbles and his eyes are filled with tears again, but soon he nods firmly. And before he climbs on Izuku's back he looks around, then brings a piece of dark cloth over and offers it to Izuku.

Izuku recognizes it as the cloak that Muscular had worn. It's torn, but that might actually suit him better since the man was far larger than him anyways.

"Thanks," Izuku says and lets Kota help him tie the cloth around this shoulders. It won't hide his mangled arms, but at least it hides his torso. Most importantly, it hides his back.

Only then does Kota carefully climb onto Izuku's back and wrap his arms around his neck.

"Ready?" Izuku asks, and feels Kota nod against his neck. "Then let's get you out of here."

And with a crackle of green sparks, they finally leave the cliff behind.

*

<Students of Class A and B! You've been authorized by Eraserhead to fight back! And one of the villains' targets has been identified! Student... Kacchan? If you're 'Kacchan', avoid battle and stick with others!>

"...Got that, 'Kacchan'?" Shouto deadpans, and the vein on Bakugo's temple throbs alarmingly. Honestly, Shouto is surprised that it hasn't burst yet.

"Shut the *fuck* up, Half and Half, I'll kill you first if you ever call me that again," Bakugo snarls. *"Fuck* you Deku, what the fuck have you done this time?"

"At the very least, we know that he made it to Mandalay," Tokoyami comments, and Shoji nods.

"Then shall we change our destination? Now that we know that Midoriya is not on the mountain, we should focus on getting Bakugo to safety."

"Don't you even fucking *dare* think of protecting me, you morons,"

Bakugo barks, but everyone just kind of ignores him.

Shouto had run straight in the direction he'd seen Midoriya's distress call. But on the way, he'd run into Bakugo fighting alone against one of the villains. The villain's lightning-fast blades had kept them both from being able to break past him, and they'd only gotten rid of him by accident a few moments ago when they came across Shoji and a rampaging Dark Shadow.

Once Dark Shadow had been subdued by Shouto and Bakugo, Shoji and Tokoyami had agreed to go with Shouto to help Midoriya. (Bakugo had harrumphed, but he hadn't objected.) But if Midoriya is with Mandalay, then...

"We should probably go straight to the base," Shouto agrees.

They make it partway in relative silence when Bakugo lets out a low growl.

"That arrogant bastard had better be waiting there, because I have *words* for him."

"Wow. There are villains running around, and your priority is me?" a voice calls dryly from the woods. "I'm not sure if I should be more worried or flattered."

Shouto's heart jumps at the familiar voice. "Midori—"

"DEKUUU!! What the fuck did... you..."

Bakugo's enraged yell trails off as Midoriya steps out of the woods and they all get a proper look at him. Shoji makes a noise of surprise and Tokoyami's beak clicks in disproval.

Shouto's heart feels like someone grabbed it and *squeezed.*

Midoriya has a small smile on his face, but despite his easy expression, his body is a *mess.* Even with the bulky black cloth tied around his torso, Shouto can still see how both his arms are a familiar sickening purple. Midoriya's fingers had looked like that when he'd overused them at the Sports Festival, but for both his entire arms to be that way, not to mention all the cuts, bruises, and blood he can see all over his body...

And Midoriya is still *smiling.*

Surprisingly, it's Bakugo who's the one to break the silence.

"You look like shit."

Midoriya snorts at his childhood friend's unflinching crassness.

"Thanks, Kacchan," he says dryly. "Though I think I look pretty good for having had a mountain dropped on me—"

"What?!" Shouto can't help but exclaim. Midoriya whispers a small *oops,* and then tries to do damage control.

"It was only part of a mountain? Like, the tip of an iceberg?" he tries. "And there was a metal table or something keeping the worst of the weight off me!"

Shouto shakes his head, approaching Midoriya and scanning him from head to toe to try to access his injuries.

"What are you even doing here?" Tokoyami asks. "Weren't you with Mandalay?"

"I was," Midoriya nods as he lets Shouto turn him around and check his back discreetly under the cloth. "But I'd left Kacchan *alone,* and I was worried..."

"For the last time, I don't need you fuckers protecting me!"

"Well, now we can all head to the base together."

"Stop ignoring me, you morons!"

Shouto finally acknowledges that he can't do anything about Midoriya's injuries here and sighs. Instead, he takes off the button up shirt he'd been wearing over his t-shirt and hands it to Midoriya.

He eyes the others.

"Turn around."

Tokoyami blinks at him. Shoji raises his brows and Bakugo scoffs.

"Seriously? We're all guys, Half and Half."

But Midoriya gives them an awkward smile. "Please?"

It probably says something about all of them that at that single word

from Midoriya the three of them turn around without needing further prompting, though Bakugo does grumble about sensitive idiots or whatever. Shouto ignores him in favour of untying the black cloth from around Midoriya's shoulders and helping him shrug on and button his shirt.

"Seriously," Midoriya smiles at him. "How would I manage without you?"

"Apparently you can't," Shouto responds tightly, unhappy at the clear evidence that Midoriya had been in a brutal fight and *he hadn't been there for him.* "I told you you're villain catnip; I should just tie you to me or something from now on."

"Really, if anyone needs to be put on a leash, it's Kacchan—"

"What the actual fuck Deku, you arrogant bastard—"

Once Midoriya is changed, Bakugo tosses a phone at him. Midoriya catches it clumsily, his usual grace and precision diminished by his injuries.

"I called," Bakugo says curtly, and Midoriya nods in thanks before tucking the phone in his pocket. Shouto doesn't know what they're talking about, but he figures he can ask when they're in the safety of the camp.

They take off after that. Shoji offers to carry Midoriya but he refuses, saying he can still walk, so Shouto wraps one arm around Midoriya's waist without asking. Midoriya eyes him out of the corner of his eye but doesn't refuse this time. After a moment, he subtly leans on Shouto and lets him take some of his weight.

They're almost back at the starting point and have found Uraraka and Asui when Shouto feels Midoriya stiffen against his side.

Before he can ask what's wrong, Midoriya *shoves* him away.

"Midori—?!"

And with a snap, he disappears into a tiny orb that's promptly snatched away by a gloved hand.

"Midoriya!" The anguished call is torn from his throat as Shouto reaches out futilely. The others all whirl around at his wretched cry and they all see a masked figure flip away onto a tree branch. The

man tips his top hat at them.

“Ahh, it looks like my trick has been discovered far too quickly,” he laments. Then he brings one hand up to his earpiece. “I have Midoriya Izuku but not Bakugo Katsuki. ...Hm? Return? ...Very well. Bakugo was only ever a side goal after all, and *Midoriya* was our main objective.”

The villain ends the transmission. Shouto gets the feeling that the villain is looking over their stunned faces with glee.

“Oh, of course. You found out that Bakugo was our objective, yes? But unfortunately for you, he was only ever our secondary goal. A side note, if you will. So while you were all concerned about him, you left Midoriya wide open for the taking.”

He sweeps a mocking bow at them.

“Misdirection is, after all, the basic of magic.”

And with that, he runs off.

“Oh no you don’t,” Shouto seethes as he and the others shake off their shock and run after the villain. *“Give him back!”*

Shouto *refuses* to lose Midoriya to anyone or anything.

(Even if Midoriya isn’t technically *his* to lose.)

*

But life isn’t fair.

And it certainly isn’t kind.

*

Uraraka sighs as she ends the call with her parents.

It's been a full day since the… *incident,* and they're still worried despite her assurances, asking if Uraraka is sure she doesn't want them to come over.

She's sure. She isn't the one with grievous injuries. She isn't the one still unconscious from the gas.

She isn't the one who's been kidnapped.

Instead of heading to her apartment, Uraraka slips back into the private waiting room of the hospital that's been designated for Class A. Despite it being well into the evening, Uraraka finds that she isn't the only one still here.

Iida, Todoroki, Bakugo, and Kirishima are here too.

The others who aren't still knocked out from the gas or have serious injuries have trickled in and out during the day, but Uraraka along with the above boys have almost never left the room since they got here.

She understands, especially Todoroki and Bakugo.

After having lost Midoriya *right in front of their eyes…* it's hard to stay home.

Uraraka clenches her fists as the memory surfaces again.

She was right there. She was *right there,* and she couldn't do anything to save Midoriya. None of them could even catch up to the masked villain.

Deku would have come up with a plan, she can't help but think.

But Deku wasn't there because we couldn't save him.

Uraraka angrily brushes a sleeve over her eyes. She doesn't deserve to cry. Not when she's failed him again. She promised not to let him down, and look what's happened.

She doesn't even know if it's better or worse that she's not alone in this.

She looks around the room.

Iida and Kirishima are by the mini fridge, talking quietly with a subdued air. They hadn't been there when Midoriya was taken, and

they both seem to blame themselves for their inaction.

Bakugo is sitting in the corner of the room he had commandeered from the moment he got here, his head bowed and hands clasped. Uraraka doesn't think she's ever seen him so quiet for so long.

And Todoroki just kind of vacantly stares out into space from his seat on the sofa. Sometimes, his eyes look almost dead.

Uraraka can relate.

All the fear, rage, disbelief, guilt...

She feels it too.

So Uraraka just quietly takes a seat next to Todoroki on the sofa. The boy looks over at her, nods wordlessly in greeting, then goes back to staring at nothing.

They're quiet, the five of them, waiting for who knows what.

It's jarring when the sound of a ringtone pierces the silence.

To Uraraka's (and Todoroki's too, judging from the way he blinks slowly before reaching for his pocket) surprise, it's Todoroki's phone. His movements are slow, as if he doesn't much care that someone's calling him.

That is, until he sees who the caller is.

Todoroki bolts upright when he sees the caller, banging his knee against the coffee table and not even seeming to notice.

"Todoroki?" Uraraka calls, but Todoroki's eyes never leave the screen.

"It's from Midoriya," he whispers, and a jolt goes down Uraraka's spine.

Bakugo springs up from his seat and Iida seems to use his quirk for how fast he comes to their side.

"I'll go get Aizawa-sensei and the police!" Kirishima calls as he runs out, but Todoroki doesn't even seem to be aware of that as he hits the button to receive the call.

"Midoriya?" he calls in a trembling voice as soon as the call goes through, and there's something absolutely *heartwrenching* in his

expression.

Uraraka might have felt self-conscious at the vulnerability Todoroki is uncharacteristically letting show if she herself hadn't had her heart in her throat.

But the voice that answers isn't the one they've been desperately waiting for.

"Ah," comes the voice on the other side. "Not quite."

Todoroki's phone creaks in his grip. "Who is this? Where's Midoriya?"

"Hm? Oh, I suppose I never really spoke to anyone besides Midoriya, so I can't blame you for not recognizing my voice. Let's see, where's the video call button... a-ha."

The screen switches to a video feed just as Kirishima rushes back in with Aizawa, an alarmingly gaunt blonde man, and several police officers. But the students watching Todoroki's phone barely even notice them.

"Shigaraki," Bakugo growls.

The villain grins at them, his wrinkled lips stretching wide behind the severed hand on his face.

"Hmm? You already have the police? Good, good. I was worried there might not be a big enough audience. Looks like I got lucky, calling you."

Todoroki looks gutted.

"Where is Midoriya," he hisses. "What did you—"

"Shut up already. I didn't call to listen to you," Shigaraki grouses irritably. "I'm putting you on mute… there."

The police officers scramble around with pieces of equipment.

"Hook it up to a bigger screen and start recording. Hurry and track the signal before we lose it—"

Todoroki's hand tightens protectively when an officer tries to take the phone from him, only to go defeatedly slack a moment later as if remembering himself. Soon enough Todoroki's phone is hooked up to various devices, Shigaraki's face now emblazoned on a wide screen.

Aizawa and the skeletal man hover behind them as the students group together in front of the screen. Some of the police look like they want to usher the kids out but they stubbornly stay put, Bakugo snarling at them and Todoroki not even seeming to notice their existence.

The villain brings the screen close to his eyes and peers at them, then his face splits into an eerie grin.

“The kids, Eraserhead... good, that’s a decent audience. Midoriya’s being a little stubborn, you see,” Shigaraki’s drawl echoes over the speakers. “Showing him his ‘friends’ just might provoke him enough for me to get under his skin. Like that time with you and Nomu, Eraserhead,” the villain's eyes gleam in cruel delight, and Uraraka can hear Aizawa’s teeth grind.

“Hm.” Shigaraki’s head turns, then vanishes from sight for a moment as the screen shakes. “Here, Kurogiri, put this in your breast pocket so we can film without anyone noticing for the moment.”

“Very well,” demures a voice that Uraraka recognizes belongs to the deceptively composed warp villain. “Shall we return to the others, then?”

Shigaraki turns and leads them down a dark corridor. As they approach a door at the end of a hallway, the sound of muffled voices and crashing grows larger. Uraraka presses a hand to her mouth as Shigaraki opens the door and light spills out.

The screen pans around the room at the doorway, as if Kurogiri is purposefully turning to let them get a good look around.

Several people are scattered around what looks like a bar. A large person that’s wearing sunglasses indoors is sporting a nosebleed while someone in a full body suit is nursing one side of his face. Two people —one that looks reptilian and another that has patchwork skin—are in the middle of the room, holding down a struggling Midoriya.

The blonde man that Uraraka doesn’t recognize makes a wounded sound and Aizawa clenches his fists.

The students in the room seem to collectively catch their breaths at their first look of Midoriya in a full day. He’s—he’s still hurt, his arms are still the mangled mess they were, and there’s a trickle of fresh blood running from the corner of his mouth, but his eyes are bright and his head is held high and he’s *alive.*

“That’s Magne, Spinner, Compress…” one of the police officers names off the villains in sight.

“What happened, Dabi?” Shigaraki asks as he steps further into the room.

The dark-haired villain pinning down Midoriya raises his head.

“Made a run for it the moment Twice took off the handcuffs to look at his injuries. I’m guessing he tried to run away while you and Kurogiri weren’t here.”

“Rude.”

Toga skips closer and crouches down in front of Midoriya. She pulls out a knife and traces the tip over his face, humming lightly.

“You’re so *cute* when you’re bloody and ragged,” she breathes dreamily. “I wonder if I should cut you up just a little bit more…?”

Midoriya doesn’t even flinch away from the blade.

Uraraka blindly reaches out to grab something, anything, to ground herself, and finds herself clutching Todoroki’s arm. But the boy doesn’t seem to even notice Uraraka’s death grip on him as he glares holes into the screen.

“Toga, back off. Let him up,” Shigaraki orders with a careless wave, and Compress rightens a chair that seems to have been knocked over and carries it back to the middle of the room. The two haul Midoriya into the chair, fastening the many strappings over his torso, arms, and legs. Uraraka can’t help the whimper she lets out when they shove Midoriya’s broken hands into blocky handcuffs.

The screen wobbles for a moment as Kurogiri seems to move behind the bar, positioning himself in a way that gives them a good view of the entire room.

“Right,” Shigaraki says as he settles into a stool. “So, where were we?”

Midoriya, with all the self-preservation instincts of a lemming, *snorts.*

“I think we were at the point where you were futilely trying to recruit me to your evil club for reasons I can’t fathom,” he says blithely, “and I was telling you *no, thank you, now fuck off.”*

Aizawa's jaw works as he visibly clenches his teeth and the skeletal

man makes a sound that's almost a whimper at Midoriya's deliberate provocation. He's at the mercy of a room full of villains, and if anything, it seems to have only loosened his tongue. While part of Uraraka is proud of her friend's unyeilding will, the other, larger part of her is absolutely *terrified* on his behalf.

It's rare for Uraraka to hear Midoriya swear so crassly, but Shigaraki just shrugs like this isn't the first time.

"Like I said, *rude."* He casually leans his elbow on the counter of the bar. "See, this is why I wanted the other one too. I'm sure you would have come around sooner if you saw your *friend* join us."

At that revelation, Bakugo's shoulders rise to his ears like the hackles of some angered beast.

But Midoriya's eyes widen in astonishment, before he full out *laughs.*

"That's why you wanted to kidnap Kacchan? Because you thought you could recruit him to be a *villain?"*

There's a kind of self-deprecating humour in Midoriya's voice as he grins savagely at a surprised Shigaraki.

"Bakugo Katsuki will never be anything but a *great* hero," he states with unyielding conviction. "And you're an *idiot* if you ever thought otherwise."

(And Uraraka catches, out of the corner of her eye, that Bakugo's shoulders have dropped laxly. He's staring at his childhood friend with something that Uraraka can't quite place, red eyes blown wide at the unshakable faith and vehement defence on his behalf.)

Shigaraki bristles, but another voice cuts in before he can respond.

"Alright, I'd say that's enough. You've had an entire day with him, Shigaraki. It's our turn now."

An earsplitting scrape rings over the speakers as one of the villains—the dark-haired one with patchwork skin that Shigaraki called Dabi—drags a chair over and places it directly in front of Midoriya. He straddles it, crossing his arms over the back, and rests his chin on his arms as he gazes at Midoriya.

"Seems like you have a lot of faith in heroes," he comments. "But heroes are *corrupt.* Sometimes, they're worse than villains. You need to

see that."

Midoriya narrows his eyes at the familiar ideals.

"A follower of Stain?" he guesses, and Dabi grins.

"Yup. We're here to reform the entire system. And you can help. Some of us," he nods to Spinner, "wanted to just leave you with the heroes since you've already got Stain's approval. But I think you can do *so much more* with us."

Disdain enters Dabi's expression as he curls his lips.

"Heroes are corrupt," he repeats. "For a better future where corrupt heroes burn and fall to the ground, we can't let them have their way anymore. We have to strike hard and deliver a message. Like Stain. Like Salamander."

The last name is unfamiliar to Uraraka, but suddenly, Midoriya goes very, very, still.

"...Salamander?" he whispers.

Dabi grins. "Oh, you might not know him, since you would've been a little too young. He was a vigilante that worked about a decade ago. I looked up to him a lot, especially since he used fire like me. I even dyed my hair black as a tribute to him."

Midoriya stares at Dabi for a long moment.

Then, he does something that surprises everyone.

He bursts out laughing.

Everyone, from the villains to the people in the waiting room, is startled. They watch in dumbstruck surprise as Midoriya laughs and laughs and *laughs* himself hoarse, sounding like shards of broken glass are rasping out of his throat.

(Todoroki is the only one who recognizes that sound. It's exactly how Midoriya had laughed when they'd talked at the Sports Festival; like he's laughing because if he doesn't, he'll *shatter.*)

"Of course it's him," Midoriya finally manages to calm down enough to say. "Even after all this time, *of course* he's still influencing my life."

Midoriya looks Dabi in the eye with a strange glint in his eyes and a

humourless half-smile on his lips.

“Salamander was never a vigilante. He was never interested in social reform. All he wanted was the suffering of others. He was never anything but a bad person. A *villain.”*

Dabi shakes himself out of his surprise at the insult to his idol.

“Watch what you say,” he narrows his eyes in warning. “Even if you’ve been approved by Stain, just because I won’t kill you doesn’t mean I won’t hurt you.”

But Midoriya just lets out another bark of dark laughter at the threat.

“Salamander was even worse than Stain in terms of ideals. If he wanted to reform anything then he would have started with himself, seeing as he used to beat his son and the person who was equivalent to his wife within an inch of death every day.”

Dabi stills as if that strikes a personal nerve.

“No,” he denies, “Salamander wouldn’t have been a child beating, *wife beating* monster. You don’t know that—”

“Oh, but I do,” Midoriya says as he bares his teeth, and his snarl of a grin is as sharp as a knife glinting in sunlight.

“He was my father.”

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“Huh,” Shigaraki breaks the stricken silence. “Well, this wasn’t exactly what I had in mind. Originally I’d only planned on some light blackmailing or something, but I guess this works too.”

And then he grins as his hand closes in on the screen. He lifts the phone from Kurogiri's breast pocket and dangles it right in front of Midoriya's face, showing him the video call screen.

"Say hello to your friends, Midoroya," Shigaraki sing-songs. "Tell me; how does it feel to out your worst secret to the people who trusted you?"

Midoriya turns *white.*

Shigaraki laughs.

And then the screen cuts to black.

*

"This can't be true. This *can't be true.* Salamander wasn't— he couldn't have—"

"Calm down, Dabi. We don't know anything for certain yet—"

"I'm going to bust into prison and ask him myself—"

"I said, *calm down,* Dabi!"

"The heroes are already on high alert because we took their precious prize boy; we can't afford to do anything drastic until things settle down."

"Aww, I understand, Dabi! When you like someone, you want to be them! You want to kill them!"

"Toga, you are *not* helping—"

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"Whoa, Bakugo, hold up, man! You can't just go barging into people's hospital rooms! Yaoyorozu just got up, she still needs rest!"

“Fuck off, Hair for Brains. I don’t have the time or patience for this.”

“When did you *ever* have patience— wait, hold on!”

Bang!

“Ponytail!”

“What— Bakugo?”

“I heard you got a tracker on that Nomu. I need the location.”

“How did you— why—”

“What the fuck do you mean, why? *Deku’s there.”*

“Well— I mean— I, I can’t do that. The pros are handling this, we shouldn’t interfere—”

“...Yaoyorozu.”

“...!”

“Please.”

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“Uraraka! Todoroki! You can’t honestly be considering this!”

“How can we *not,* Iida?! How can *I* not?! The USJ, Stain, the mall, the training camp. Every time Deku needed help, *I wasn’t there for him.* And now he needs help more than ever. We’ve just learned that he’s been a—*abused* by a villain as a child, and now he’s been kidnapped by villains who know his fa— his tormentor. You can’t expect me to just stand by! I can’t let him down again! You understand, don’t you?!”

“...Todoroki! You and Midoriya were the ones who taught me I was in the wrong when going after Stain! You, of all people, should know better than to go try to rescue Midoriya by yourself!”

“...He pushed me away, Iida.”

"..."

"After the Stain incident, I told him not to push me away, not to put himself in harm for me. But he did it again. Before he got kidnapped by that magician, I had him. I was holding him. I had him in my arms. But then, *he pushed me away."*

"I... I'm sure it's because he wanted to protect you."

"Exactly."

"..."

"I have to, Iida. I know that you want to, too. But I... I *have* to."

*

"Good evening, Midoriya-san. We're sorry to intrude... especially in current circumstances."

"...Come in, All Might. Eraserhead."

Chapter End Notes

So, as I said... I regret everything and nothing at the same time. *Izuku headbang...?*

I know you guys have a lot of questions after The Reveal. They'll probably all get addressed/cleared up in the next chapter, but feel free to come scream at me in the comments. (prepares to bask in the chaos)

There's a reason I made it ambiguous whether the "dark-haired villain with a fire quirk" was Dabi or Hisashi. Because Dabi himself had tried to look like Hisashi in his misguided idolization.

I'm aware of the fan theory that Dabi is the missing Todoroki child. This fic doesn't take a firm stance on either side of the argument (yet) but it does lean heavily towards the 'what if' scenario. If you look at Dabi's response in this chapter considering the possibility, it adds another layer and makes Izuku's revelation

much more personal to him.
While Endeavor probably never cared enough about his other children to directly abuse them, Dabi still would have grown up watching his mother and youngest brother being abused. He would have been disenchanted by the notion of heroes since the world applauds Endeavor as the No. 2 when the man Dabi saw was so different. That could lead him to idolize vigilantes instead of the corrupt hero system. But when he learns that Salamander, the “hero” he looked up to for vigilantism, was actually the same (and arguably worse) child-beating, wife-beating man as Endeavor, his entire worldview crumbles.
It is, intentionally, a similar moment to when Izuku learns that Endeavor, the “hero” he looked up to for using fire for good, was actually the parallel of Hisashi.

"You're Next"

Chapter Notes

I didn't add this in the AN for the last chapter because I didn't want to kill the mood, but all I could think of during The Reveal was
Deku Vader: He was my father.
Dabi Skywalker: NOOOOOOOOOOO
Pfffft. Okay, okay, I'll stop now. *serious face on*

If any of you have fan art or whatnot, please don't be shy and let me know. I LIVE for any attention you spare me. You can tag me on Tumblr, or leave a comment with the link, or even ask for my email.

Izuku's flame wings by justachurro: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/181946528214/a-fan-art-for-burn-your-wings-from-justachurro

And I don't know if these count as fan art... fan memes? Yeah, I kinda like fan memes.

BYW/Spider-man Homecoming from apassingwolf: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/180755810179/apassingwolf-if-full-cowl-isnt-enough-if-one

BYW/Spongebob from krabpopz: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/181564116329/im-s-c-r-e-a-m-i-n-g-owhitekiwibird

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aizawa pulls out the file and places it on the desk in front of him. He had looked over it when he'd first gone over all the files, but while he'd paused on it (if only because the villain had a fire-based quirk) he had quickly passed over it seeing it didn't mention any children in any of the incidents. He hadn't thought it was related to his problem child.

But now he knows better.

He stares down at the file.

Villain name: Salamander

Quirk: Fire Breathing

Charges: Multiple incidents of assault, murder, attempted murder, and arson over the course of a year.

Verdict: Life sentence

The villain had been caught a full decade ago by Eraserhead.

Unlike most villains, his motivation wasn't to pursue wealth, an agenda, or even some personal grudge. He just wanted to watch people suffer at his hands. But Salamander was no fool. He knew that if he targeted civilians or heroes, he would be put on their radar. So Salamander played it smart and only went after other villains and dwellers of the underworld. It's not like villains are going to be able to come knocking on the police station and ask for help, after all. And so it had taken the law a full year to pin down Salamander. Some cases of buildings burning down and gangs being demolished have been traced back to the villain only after he'd been caught.

The fact that his many crimes never included thievery and that he only targeted villains and other shady people is the biggest reason the man had been able to get away with his crimes for so long. But Aizawa can see how some people (like Dabi) might have taken that as vigilantism instead of the cold cunning calculation it was.

The picture on the file shows a man with snapping black eyes and curly black hair. Midoriya doesn't bear that much resemblance to the man at first glance. But the subtlest similarities are there, if you know what to look for.

There had been a lot of signs, if you knew what to look for.

(That's just the problem. Aizawa *saw* them, but he *hadn't known* what they meant.)

Aizawa recalls the first day he'd met Midoriya in person. The kid had recognized him as Eraserhead just by seeing his *face.* Sure, some hardcore fanboy may have put two and two together after seeing Aizawa use his quirk, but there's a reason Aizawa is an underground

hero, not to mention that he avoids the media like the plague when he can get away with it. That means Midoriya's familiarity with him can only come from a more personal interest. (And Aizawa had not at all been prepared to deal with the absolute *adoration* and respect in Midoriya's big wide eyes.)

And then there had been that quirk assessment test. Midoriya had been alarmingly unfamiliar with his quirk, especially compared to how naturally his peers used theirs. It's never a good sign when that happens because quirks are supposed to be like any other part of your body, and Midoriya should have grown up using it and testing it like any other child. Actively repressing your quirk hints at major issues.

Not to mention Midoriya's casual lack of self-preservation and the insane amount of pain tolerance to match it.

Then Recovery Girl had told him about the scars.

"They were old," she had said. *"I'd say at least five, maybe even over ten years old. Treated by an amateur, too, and he didn't deny it when I guessed he'd treated it himself instead of getting proper medical attention. And they're not just from ordinary scrapes. Those were knife marks. They were focused on the outside of his forearms, suggesting he'd been trying to shield himself from someone larger wielding a knife. And Aizawa, that was just his left forearm. I didn't even get to see the entire arm, let alone the rest of his body. And I... I fear what I might find."*

After that revelation had come the absolute mess that the USJ had turned out to be. In the aftermath, Aizawa had noticed that Midoriya unconsciously calls him "Eraserhead" instead of "sensei" under stress and that the kid is absolutely *traumatized* by the fire side of his quirk. For fuck's sake, Midoriya had *apologized* after having almost single-handedly held off the three main villains.

The signs had been there. Aizawa had seen them, had noted them, had been kept up at night worrying about them. But he hadn't known what they meant, and so he'd been completely blindsided when the truth had hit them with all the delicacy of a freight train.

"A bad person."

"A villain."

"He was my father."

And Midoriya had *laughed,* as if this was some black comedy, as if he

should have expected this, as if thinking *of course this is my life.* He had laughed and laughed and *laughed* like he didn't know what else to do, like something had shattered inside him and laughing was the only way he knew how to choke out the broken pieces.

"Beaten within an inch of death every day," Midoriya had said.

If Salamander was arrested ten years ago, that means Midoriya has been regularly and brutally beaten when he was only five years old, or —god forbid—even *younger.*

Aizawa thinks of all the small details, little tells, strange habits of Midoriya that he'd noted and filed away but not fully understood. Those memories swirl around his head like the fury of a howling blizzard.

...There had been a lot of signs, if you knew what to look for.

Aizawa just hadn't understood what they meant.

He hadn't.

And now that he does...

Aizawa has to consciously unclench his teeth and work his jaw. He forces his hands out of the death grip they'd had on the ends of his capture weapon.

He sits there staring at the file for a long, long time.

Eventually, All Might comes looking for him. The hero pauses at the doorway of the office for a moment, watching Aizawa's slumped form with haggard and haunted eyes, before he clears his throat.

"It's time to go."

Aizawa nods and stands as he puts away the file in a locked drawer.

Before he shuts it closed, he catches one last look at the file. His eyes linger on the part that had made him unable to link Salamander to Midoriya in the first place.

Name: Takahashi Hisashi

Family relations: None

*

“Good evening, Midoriya-san. We’re sorry to intrude… especially in current circumstances.”

“…Come in, All Might. Eraserhead.”

*

Unlike Salamander, Midoriya Inko’s relationship with her son is instantly apparent in their resemblance to each other. They have the same wide green eyes, the same soft round features, and even pretty much the same hairstyle.

In regards to appearances, Aizawa and All Might have differed from their norms. Both are dressed in solid black suits. Aizawa is clean shaven and has tamed his hair from the usual careless mess to something presentable, and All Might is using the precious little time he has to buff his body into his hero form.

It’s the very least they can do.

Both heroes (both teachers) follow Midoriya Inko into a small living room. The two settle down on one side of the coffee table while Inko seats herself on the other side and quietly pours them some tea.

All three of them are silent for a long moment, staring down at the steam swirling up from the untouched tea.

Eventually, it’s Aizawa who breaks the silence.

“First and foremost, we… I owe you an apology.” The hero (the teacher) (the man) bows his head low. “Not only was Midoriya severely injured again while under my care, but I didn’t think to order him back to safety. So he went to protect Bakugo even in his wounded state and ended up in the perfect situation to get kidnapped. It’s my fault.”

“As it is mine,” All Might is quick to follow. Even sitting down he’s

much taller in his buffed form, but that only means he lowers his head that much more. “Midoriya was likely targeted at least partly because of me. I couldn’t hide my... fondness, for him, and that made him a target. I... we are so very sorry, Midoriya-san.”

Inko stares down at their bowed heads for a long moment. Here is All Might, the No. 1 hero, and Eraserhead, the hero who liberated her and her son from Hisashi. Here are two people who, under almost any other circumstance, she would have been a nervous *mess* at meeting, and they’re bowing down their heads as low as they can to her. But right now, she only feels...

Empty.

Because no matter who these people are, Izuku is Inko’s *world.*

“I don’t know what to say,” she finally admits in a hollow voice. “I know that you’re not to blame. I know that it’s the villains’ fault. I know that you two have already done so much for Izuku, whether you know it or not.”

At those last words, Aizawa and All Might both *wince.* Inko watches them with an unflinching gaze.

“But that doesn’t change the fact that my son is missing.”

Aizawa closes his eyes. All Might swallows thickly. He shouldn’t say this, especially since Tsukauchi himself had crossed a few lines when telling him in the first place, but faced with the hollowness in Inko’s green eyes—eyes that are so much like young Midoriya’s—he can’t help but try to reassure her.

“The police have a lead,” he tells her in a rush. They hadn’t been able to track the signal from Shiagaraki’s phone call (figures that the villain would only call when he knew the signal was jammed) but Tsukauchi had found a potential hideout and young Yaoyorozu had been able to place a tracker on the Nomu that had appeared. “The police haven’t announced it in hopes of making the villains complacent and taking them by surprise, but we have a solid lead. We’re launching a rescue as soon as possible. Tomorrow, in fact. The only thing we’re waiting for is gathering all the heroes we can so that there’s no chance of failure.”

It isn’t an excuse.

“We... I *will* save young Midoriya.”

It's a promise.

Inko stares at All Might. His eyes that are usually shadowed in this form are all but burning with fervour.

This is the No. 1 hero giving her his personal promise. And yet...

All she can do is nod numbly.

Silence reigns once more before Aizawa musters his will to bring up the one thing he wishes he didn't have to.

"I'm very sorry I have to bring this up, Midoriya-san. But the League of Villains now knows Midoriya's relationship with Salamander... Takahashi Hisashi."

Inko's hands clasp each other tightly. She'd been warned over the phone about this topic so she knew it had to come up, but she still isn't prepared.

She'll probably never be prepared.

"They may try to contact him in prison or use him against you and Midoriya. If you can tell us anything about your husband—"

"No," Inko cuts off sharply, raising her head fully for the first time. She gives Aizawa a surprisingly hard look. "I have... so many regrets regarding Hisashi. Not being able to see him for who he was in the beginning. Not being able to stop him. Not being able to protect Izuku from him. Not being able to just *leave*. But Hisashi was *never* my husband. That's the one thing I've *never* regretted."

She slumps a little after that, as if the fight has gone out of her. Aizawa remembers what Midoriya had referred her to during the video chat. He'd called himself Hisashi's son, but he'd never said Inko was his wife. No, he had put it as...

"The person who was equivalent to his wife."

Takahashi Hisashi and *Midoriya* Inko.

Midoriya Izuku.

It confirms what Aizawa had suspected once he'd digged up Salamander's file again and found the man's surname.

"You weren't married, then," he states more than asks.

Inko shakes her head tiredly.

"...I lived with him. I had Izuku with him. But we were never legally married."

She gives them a brittle smile.

"I suppose you would want me to talk about him... about us."

"...Only if you are alright with it, Midoriya-san."

"It's not alright. It'll never be alright. But if it helps keep Izuku safe, then I'll do *anything.*"

Inko's breath hitches and she lets out a watery laugh that's packed with guilt and self-deprecation.

"I have to start *sometime.*"

She takes in a deep breath, then lets it out slowly. Her eyes avoid both Aizawa and All Might again, keeping her gaze fixed unseeingly on her tightly clasped hands. Her nails dig into her plump flesh, but she doesn't seem to even notice the slight pain.

"...I met Hisashi when I was nineteen," she begins quietly. "I had just lost my family, and he never had any. He was the only one who seemed to *understand.* So when he moved, I followed."

Both Aizawa and All Might are deathly still, not even daring to breathe loudly as Inko dregs up memories that she'd spilt so much blood and tears over, memories she'd tried so hard to bury.

"We never made it official," she continues. "He never brought it up and I never felt the need. I wondered if we should, when we had Izuku, but... in the end, I decided not to. So I put Izuku under my name, and even if all three of us lived together as a family for all intents and purposes, there was never anything legally binding us. Hisashi was Izuku's father. But he was never my husband."

Then Inko shudders, that self-loathing and guilt surfacing again.

"But in the end, it didn't matter. Even if there were no strings officially tying me to him, I couldn't dare go against Hisashi when he... *changed.*"

And Aizawa doesn't want to ask. He *doesn't.* But All Might looks too stricken to bite the bullet and Inko looks too lost in memories, but

they need anything and *everything* in order to protect Midoriya.

So he swallows hard, and forces the words through clenched teeth.

"...What happened?"

Inko lets out a breath as if she'd been waiting for that question.

"Hisashi started beating me," she quietly admits.

Aizawa and All Might already knew this, of course, from Midoriya's unwitting reveal.

It doesn't make it any easier to listen to.

"It would have been alright if it was just me. I could have taken it if Hisashi *only* beat me. I... I locked Izuku in the broom cupboard so that Hisashi couldn't get to him, in hopes that at least he would be spared. But Izuku... he broke out. And *he stepped between us.*"

All Might bites back the sound that threatens to make out of his throat. It sounds like exactly what his boy would do. And while it's the sort of thing a natural hero would do, instead of making him proud, it makes him *ache.*

Aizawa closes his eyes. So this is where his problem child's crippling issues (hero complex, abundant selflessness, willingness to sacrifice, lack of self-regard, low self-worth, astonishment at the care and acknowledgement from others) all started.

Inko lets out a choked sob, tears starting to spill from her wide eyes.

"Again and again and *again.* Izuku took the beating for me *every, single, time.* And I couldn't stop either of them."

She looks up at them then, and her eyes are bright with tears and wild with something bordering on hysteria.

"Do you know how that feels? To watch the *one good thing* in your life risk *his* life for you time and time again because *you* couldn't do it for both of you?"

And even in her state, even while tearing her heart out and baring it to them, even when finally letting out the words she'd kept buried like opening floodgates, Midoriya Inko is still quiet. Her sobs are stifled and her breaths are choked and her words are little more than a whisper.

It shows just how much she must have been oppressed. Just how much she's *used* to being oppressed.

And it reminds both heroes (both teachers) (both men who call Midoriya Izuku *theirs* in some way; *my* boy, *my* problem child) how Midoriya never shouts. How he's always hyper aware of people's presences. How he can move as silently as a ghost. How he doesn't seem used to physical contact that isn't violent.

The signs had been there.

But neither of them had known what they meant.

Inko curls into herself and shakes with near-silent sobs. Neither Aizawa or All Might can move to comfort her because her body language makes it clear that's not what she wants.

Besides. What right do they have when they've failed Midoriya Izuku as well?

So instead of saying futile comforts, this time it's All Might who swallows around the painful lump in his throat and braves to ask.

"...Aizawa... Eraserhead arrested your... I mean, Salamander a decade ago. That would have made young Midoriya five years old when... when it ended."

Inko nods, choking on her tears.

"He was three when it began."

Those softly whispered words punch the air out of Aizawa's and All Might's lungs.

Inko raises her head. She doesn't even bother brushing away her tears. Instead, she looks both stricken heroes in the eye.

"I thought it was over, now that Hisashi isn't here. But Izuku... Izuku has never been able to *not* help someone, even if it meant hurting himself. And as much as it breaks my heart, I can't stop him from doing what he wants to do. Not after I've utterly failed him. And I can't protect him either. But you two... you've already saved him. He's always looked up to you so much. You're his heroes. So please."

Green eyes that are so much like Midoriya Izuku's bore into them.

"Be Izuku's hero again."

Inko's breath hitches and her voice breaks, but her eyes are unyielding.

"Bring my son home."

*

"This can't be true. This *can't be true.* Salamander wasn't— he couldn't have—"

"Calm down, Dabi. We don't know anything for certain yet—"

"I'm going to bust into prison and ask him myself—"

"I said, *calm down,* Dabi!"

"The heroes are already on high alert because we took their precious prize boy; we can't afford to do anything drastic until things settle down."

"Aww, I understand, Dabi! When you like someone, you want to be them! You want to kill them!"

"Toga, you are *not* helping—"

Izuku barely hears the ruckus the villains are kicking up amongst themselves. His mind is filled with the sight he'd glimpsed in the split second Shigaraki had shown him the video call screen of his own phone. It was too dark and too quick to make out everyone, and there were people in the background wearing what looked like police uniforms, but he's fairly certain he saw the faces of some of his closest friends. And All Might. And Aizawa.

Every single one of them had looked absolutely *horrified.*

Izuku winces again at the memory.

Todoroki and Bakugo already knew that his father had been abusive, but neither of them had known Hisashi had been an actual *villain.*

Being a bad person is not the same thing as being a villain.

And now, they know. They all know.

Izuku swallows thickly. He had *never* intended to tell any of them, and especially not like *this*. He can't, he can't even imagine how they might be taking this, and oh god, he never meant to tell them, never meant for them to find out, they trusted him, what will they think of him for keeping this a secret, what will they think of him for being the son of a—

"You!"

Suddenly Dabi is in Izuku's face, grasping his shoulders in an iron grip. He would have lifted Izuku clean off his feet if he hadn't been strapped down to the chair.

"Tell me the truth," the man hisses. "Was Salamander really— did he really—?!"

Izuku stares up at the villain with wide eyes. Dabi's lost control of his quirk in his agitation and licks of flame are rolling around him, making a sharp contrast with his shaggy black hair. He isn't even breathing out the fire, and Dabi himself said that his hair colour is dyed.

But for a moment, Izuku sees Hisashi.

Dabi flinches. Perhaps he sees the recognition and the fleeting fear in Izuku's eyes because he lets go of Izuku as if he's been burned. He takes an unsteady step back, staring at Izuku, his eyes swirling with a mess of emotions. He works his jaw but no words come out.

And then, he whirls around and storms out of the room.

"Dabi!" Magne calls after him. Spinner makes to follow, but Shigaraki waves a hand at them.

"Let him be. He needs to cool his head."

"But..."

The other villains eye the door uncertainly but Shigaraki doesn't seem bothered in the slightest. If anything, he looks *delighted*.

"So, you're the son of a villain, huh?" he grins from behind the severed hand, and Izuku flinches at the reminder. Shigaraki props his elbow on the bar counter and his chin in one hand, crossing an ankle over his knee, confidence and satisfaction radiating from his very pose. "I made a *great* choice calling them. You're never gonna be a

hero now that it's out. They won't want you back. No one wants to deal with that kind of baggage."

Izuku opens his mouth. He wants to tell Shigaraki he's wrong. That his friends are different. That his teachers know better. That they're good and kind and understanding.

But he can't help but hesitate because somewhere inside him a small, uncertain, utterly terrified voice whispers: *but what if?*

And in his moment of hesitation, Shigaraki's lips stretch wide and utter the words that have been burned under Izuku's eyelids and seared onto his beating heart and have plagued his every hopes and dreams for the past ten years:

"As they say. *Like father, like son.*"

Hisashi *laughs.*

—And Izuku wakes with a start.

He's breathless for a moment as he reorients himself and struggles to distinguish dream from reality, memory from present. Phantom laughter rings in his ears as it fades out. He takes a few quick, short breathes to steady himself.

Izuku looks around to find that yes, he's still strapped down in the chair and the villains are lounging around the bar. Dabi is still absent since he stormed off the other day after the phone call, but everything else seems to be the same.

Actually, scratch that.

Izuku himself is very much *not* the same as he was before he'd dozed off.

He looks down at his body to find that while he's still cuffed and strapped down, his gritty clothes have been changed (and something inside Izuku twinges painfully at that because *Todoroki* had given him that shirt, and he'd taken more comfort in it than he'd realized) and his wounds have been healed. Even his arms, previously shattered and mangled, are miraculously put together. His muscles ache with fatigue when he experimentally rolls his shoulders, but the telling creak and shooting pain of broken bones is absent.

“What did you drug me with?” is the first thing that comes out of Izuku’s mouth. Because no matter how exhausted he was, there’s no way he would have just slept through someone touching him enough to change and heal him. Not with how light a sleeper he normally is, and definitely not with how high-strung he is at being trapped in a villain hideout.

Magne waves a hand at him.

“Relax, pumpkin pie. We only put a bit of drugs in your water to keep you knocked out for the treatment since you tried to run away the last time we untied you. Muscular messed you up bad.”

“Well, you should see the other guy,” Izuku can’t help the quip that slips out between his clenched teeth.

Izuku never thought of himself as talkative (he had always been more of the silently defiant type when facing Hisashi’s violence or Bakugo’s bullying) but ever since coming to UA, he finds himself talking more and more in stressful situations. At first it had started as a deliberate, practical, and calculated tactic (stalling for time, gathering information, provoking the opponent into making a move, bringing attention off someone else and onto himself) but now he finds himself running his mouth even when he doesn’t strictly need to. Izuku wonders if, at some point, it has become something of a defence mechanism.

He brushes the thought away for the moment as Toga puffs out her lower lip and eyes him up and down.

“But I liked you better with blood. And hey hey, if there’s someone with a healing quirk, why don’t *we* get to be treated?” she turns the question to Shigaraki.

“What, were you hurt during the mission?”

“I got a paper cut yesterday!”

Shigaraki makes a sound that’s something between a sigh and a snort at Toga’s indignant pout. He shrugs one shoulder and grumbles sulkily, as if this is something he too had complained about in the past.

“Midoriya won’t be any use to us if he’s crippled, which is why he got a pass. Sensei usually won’t let us unless we’re critically injured. Says you learn from your mistakes that way.”

And at those nonchalant words, Izuku freezes

It had been pretty obvious that he'd been healed with some kind of quirk—there's no other explanation for his arms healing overnight—but it's the person Shigaraki mentioned oh so casually that makes his blood run cold.

Sensei, he'd said.

There's only one person Izuku can think of that Shigaraki would call that.

All For One.

Izuku presses his lips together. He'd known that he'd have to face the villain (or rather, THE Villain) sooner or later, given that he's the successor of One For All. But All For One is strong enough to have turned All Might into a shadow of what he was once capable of. Izuku is under no delusions that he's anywhere near ready to take him on right now.

Much less him *and* the League (that he's... mentoring?) at the same time.

The door swings open and a familiar figure steps in, making Izuku grimace. And now there's one more person he has to deal with.

"Dabi!"

"Hey! You can't just run out like that and expect a warm reception! Welcome back!"

Twice's typical conflicting speech aside, the rest of the villains greet their returned member. Dabi gives them a half-shrug and breezily apologizes for running off.

Izuku notes that Dabi is very carefully avoiding meeting Izuku's eyes.

"Took you long enough, but at least you came back in time for the show," Shigaraki grins, his chin in hand and elbow propped on the bar counter, looking immensely pleased with all this.

"The show?"

"UA's holding an apology press conference. It starts in five minutes."

Huh. Izuku hasn't heard about that— maybe it came up while he was

drugged?

“I can’t wait to see the press tear them a new one!”

“Think they’ll talk about us?”

“They will.”

Shigaraki grins as his eyes slide over to Izuku.

“They will,” he repeats, and Izuku realizes with a jolt that he’s including *Izuku* in that “us”. He almost flinches away as if he’s been physically struck, only refraining because he doesn’t want to show any weakness. Shigaraki just grins at him.

“This’ll show you that you can’t go back. You belong here, now.”

Hisashi *laughs.*

‘As I’ve always said, boy. You can’t reach the sun. You belong down here, with me.’

Izuku’s nails dig into his palms. But then, he consciously unclenches his fists.

“Great. I’m guessing I’m not getting any popcorn,” Izuku drawls dryly, perhaps going a tad overboard on the biting response. (Like he was saying, defence mechanism.) “Do I at least get a bathroom break before the show begins?”

Shigaraki sighs as if wounded, but he’s grown used to Izuku’s flippant remarks over the days. He waves a hand at the mist villain. “Kurogiri. And... Dabi. You two go with him, and hurry back. We don’t want to miss this.”

“Me?” Dabi blinks, still not looking at Izuku.

Magne makes a shooing motion at them. “Consider it punishment for bailing on us. You’re on babysitting duty now.”

For a moment it looks like Dabi is going to refuse or pass on the chore to someone else, but for some reason, he eventually stalks towards Izuku and helps Kurogiri unbind him from the chair. (He’s still not looking directly at Izuku.)

Izuku quietly follows the two out. Dabi’s strange behaviour aside, he didn’t snipe and banter with Shigaraki just for an actual bathroom

break.

On the first day of imprisonment, Izuku had shown that he'd rather face the entire League minus Kurogiri and Shigaraki than take his chances against the warp villain. So from then on the League made a point in always keeping Kurogiri and his warp quirk on watch duty. Suffice to say, Izuku hasn't made an (inevitably futile) attempt to escape since. It looks like the villains are keeping up their caution even after two days of Izuku's "good" behaviour. And since Izuku had once thrown around Kurogiri like a rag doll, there had always been another villain with Kurogiri. This time it looks like it's going to be Dabi, who's a logical choice since he's a long range fighter.

It actually makes a lot of sense. Considering how Shigaraki keeps going on about games, this positioning is almost like some game tactic. With Kurogiri and Dabi watching him, it only makes sense for Izuku to behave like all the other times Izuku had been taken to the bathroom these past few days.

But the thing is, Izuku had never been truly defeated.

He'd been waiting.

And now that his injuries are healed, well. Even if Kurogiri is here, he's willing to make a gamble.

Izuku raises his cuffed hands to his head as if to scratch the back of his neck, keeping his movements carefully nonchalant. The pair of villains don't pay him any mind, and so Izuku discreetly slips a bobby pin out of his bun. He wouldn't have been able to do this when his hands were broken and swollen, but his newly healed hand is able to deftly hide the pin between his fingers as he lowers his arms.

His heart is pounding. This is the best chance he's had so far, but he has one shot at this, he can't afford to mess up, can't be found out before he's ready. He hunches his shoulders and stretches his hands down as low as he can, trying to keep them as out of sight as possible.

"You know," he opens his mouth, and this time, it's a deliberate distraction tactic. Dabi is still avoiding looking at him, but Kurogiri's gaze is fixed on his face now even as he prods Izuku to keep walking. "I used to get locked up in the broom cupboard a lot."

He sees Dabi *flinch* at his words out of the corner of his eye, but Izuku never breaks eye contact with Kurogiri and keeps talking, trying to keep the villain's attention on his mouth and away from his hands.

Kurogiri narrows his eyes at the out of the blue subject, but he doesn't notice the way Izuku's fingers are subtly wrestling the pin into the lock of his handcuffs. Izuku gives him a winning smile.

"As you can imagine, I hate being locked up."

Kurogiri seems to be losing his patience with Izuku's seemingly random rambling. A small *click* sounds from below, and Izuku's lips stretch further over his teeth into a savage grin.

"Which is why I learned to pick locks."

"...Wait. What—?"

And as the handcuffs clatter to the ground, Izuku *pulls* Kurogiri's neck piece towards him. The villain jerks forward and Izuku wraps his newly freed hands around the armour, speed and strength enhanced by Full Cowl. Then, before any of them can do more than make a sound of surprise, Izuku *pushes* condensed flame out of his palms, mimicking Bakugo's blast.

The small explosion of fire hits Kurogiri's neck point black, targeting the one place he's corporeal through the armour, and the villain goes slack from the pressure and shock. Izuku drops him as soon as he's unconscious.

He has to move quickly. His ambush succeeded because he had the element of surprise and because Kurogiri had grown complacent after Izuku's feigned good behaviour these past few days. With his warp quirk out of the way, Izuku's chances of escape have been heightened drastically, but he still needs to deal with Dabi before the villain calls the rest of the gang—

Izuku whirls around to face the other fire-quirk user, his mind in overdrive, his heart pumping, his arms coming up in a fighting stance.

Dabi just stands there, staring at him.

For a long moment, both of them are frozen in place, both of them waiting for the other to make a move. Dabi is finally looking straight at Izuku and Izuku pants slightly, waiting for an opening.

Eventually, it's Dabi who moves first. But it isn't to attack Izuku.

He steps out of the way.

“Take a left at the end of the hallway,” the villain tells a shocked Izuku, gesturing towards the hallway behind him and keeping to the wall to give Izuku a clear path. “Then two rights. The door on the left will lead to the back alleys.”

Izuku blinks at him, taken back. Dabi had started out as one of the villains the most determined to convert Izuku, and then there had been that *mess* about Hisashi, and now he’s helping him escape?

“Why?” Izuku asks warily.

Dabi avoids his eyes again.

“...I dunno,” he finally says. “I... you... just, just go. I’ll let you go this time.”

Izuku eyes him suspiciously, but figures this probably isn’t some elaborate trap. (Even if it is, he can always punch through a wall now that his arms are healed and uncuffed.) He hesitates one last time before he takes a step forward, though. He wrestles with himself, then cautiously offers.

“...You could come with me,” he suggests quietly. From what he’s gathered from listening to the villains talk these past few days, unlike the others, Dabi hasn’t committed any crimes prior to joining the League. If he really joined because he believes in some good purpose, then maybe...

But Dabi’s gaze snaps up at that.

“No,” he denies visciously. “Just like you refuse to be a villain, I will *never* be a hero.”

And Izuku sees the steel in his eyes and the venom in his tone.

There’s a story behind Dabi’s hate for heroes and idolization of vigilantes, Izuku’s sure. But it isn’t his place or his business to ask about it, and frankly, it ranks far below *get the hell out of here* on his to-do list at the moment. So Izuku just nods in acknowledgment.

(After all, Izuku himself had had his world shaken too when he’d found out that Endeavor hadn’t been the man, the *hero* he thought he was. It had shaken Izuku, yes, but in the end, it hadn’t shaken his conviction to become a hero in his own right.)

(It looks like Dabi is the same.)

He warily takes a step forward and Dabi just shuffles further to the side, raising his hands in a clear indication that he doesn't intend to do anything. Izuku keeps his eyes on Dabi as he walks forward.

But just as he passes the older man, Izuku lights up with Full Cowl and whips around, striking the villain's neck with a precise jab in a move stolen from Eraserhead.

Dabi follows Kurogiri's lead and hits the ground like a sack of bricks before he even knows what hit him.

Because while Izuku *is* desperate enough to accept help from a villain, he *isn't* dumb enough to risk trusting him. *This time,* Dabi had said. He'd made no promises about the next time they meet, or even five minutes later.

Izuku's about to bolt down the hallway now that the immediate threats are dealt with when a SMASH shakes the entire building. Sounds of crashing, yelling, and general chaos echo up from the bar they'd just left.

Izuku hesitates. On one hand, it looks like the villains are distracted by whatever just happened. He can use this opportunity to try that door Dabi mentioned, and even if it's a trap, he can always sacrifice an arm and punch through the walls to get the hell out of here.

But on the other hand.

There's only one person he knows that can make that kind of smash.

As if to cement his decision, a tremendous roar resounds through the hallways.

"WHERE IS HE?!"

Izuku's heart skips, though not in fear. He's never heard that voice raised so much or filled with such rage, but he'd know it anywhere.

The dark corridor lights up with Full Cowl as Izuku dashes back to the bar.

He slams the door open to find the bar area a mess. The far wall has been demolished, there are branches restraining the villains, and heroes are spilling in from the hole in the wall, but—

"Midoriya, my boy!"

There's a sort of desperate relief in the voice that calls out to him.

Izuku's breath catches as his eyes zoom in on the figure standing in the middle of the room.

It's All Might.

It's the No.1 hero.

It's *his* hero.

Izuku feels like he's going to cry.

"All Mi—!"

They've just barely laid eyes on each other, hands reaching out despite the distance between them, when a black inky substance bursts out of Izuku's mouth.

Both Izuku's and All Might's eyes widen.

All Might springs towards him, arms reaching out to catch him in a familiar embrace, fear and desperation contorting his face.

"My boy—!"

The black ink spreads violently and swallows Izuku's entire body, then disappears without a trace.

All Might is left staring at his empty hands.

"—NOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!"

*

"Ahh. Welcome, Midoriya."

"...All For One."

*

Caring for someone doesn't come naturally to Shouto.

His mother, the one person who had been affectionate to him, had also rejected him with all her might, and then they had been forcefully separated. He was never allowed to play with his siblings when he was younger, and by the time Shouto grew enough of a backbone to openly defy Endeavor, they had all grown too awkward around each other. Even with his peers, Shouto was always treated as 'Endeavor's son' rather than 'Shouto'.

Shouto isn't used to being close to someone, not to mention that his social skills are next to non-existent.

And so, when Shouto found himself looking out for, looking after, and just plain *looking* at Midoriya, no one had been more surprised than Shouto himself.

On one hand, this wasn't like Shouto.

But on the other, this was Midoriya.

So he had caved to his new impulses (and truthfully, he never put up much of a fight in the first place; it had felt more like succumbing to gravity, like a moth drawn to a flame) and watched Midoriya, using any and every excuse to reach out to him.

Texting about meaningless things, helping Midoriya hide his scars, using his quirk to ice things over or heat things up, staying up beside Midoriya and just sitting together in silence...

All of it was so new and strange to Shouto. He hadn't received care in a long time, and so he wasn't sure how to give it. He knew that he's socially inept and that his attempts at looking after Midoriya were awkward at best, so he hadn't been able to shake off the feeling that he was going to mess up in his bumbling attempts one day.

But Midoriya never waved him off. He always looked pleasantly surprised, and then he would *beam* at Shouto with so much gratitude and appreciation that it made Shouto's breath stutter and make his heart feel like it would burst.

"You're going to spoil me rotten," Midoriya had grumbled half-heartedly, thankful and playful and so unbearably *fond.*

"How would I manage without you?"

But the truth is, the real question had never been how Midoriya would manage without Shouto.

It was how Shouto would manage without Midoriya.

And now he knows the answer.

He can't manage without Midoriya.

He *can't.*

It's different from Kirishima and Yaoyorozu, even from Bakugo or Iida or Uraraka.

Kirishima isn't exactly one of Midoriya's closest friends as he usually sticks with their louder classmates, but both of their winning personalities mesh well when together. Plus, the two have been growing closer recently what with Kirishima teasing Midoriya about his growing fame.

Likewise, Yaoyorozu interacts more with the other girls, but that doesn't mean she's immune to Midoriya's gravity. *"You aren't the only one worried about him,"* Yaoyorozu had said at the training camp. *"Bring him back safe."* (And Shouto had failed.)

Bakugo had been the one to propose this rescue mission in the first place. According to Kirishima, the blonde had even said please and called Yaoyorozu *by her name* just for a *chance* to find Midoriya. (Someday, Shouto is going to stop being surprised and remember that, despite their differences, Midoriya and Bakugo are childhood friends that have stuck with each other for an entire decade.)

Iida tried to keep up a front and insist that they should stick to the rules, putting up a token of protest, but he had caved a little too quickly to have been honest. He insists that he's tagging along as a "watchman," but everyone knows that he's as desperate to save Midoriya as any of them.

Uraraka has known Midoriya even before school started. Shouto has already been regaled by the story of how they met (and puked in synchronization) at the entrance exam. Both she and Iida have been practically glued to the hip with Midoriya from day one.

But it's still *different.*

They want to rescue Midoriya.

Shouto...

Shouto *has* to.

It's why he's so restless when it turns out that the hideout Yaoyorozu's tracker lead them to houses an army of Nomu but shows no sign of Midoriya. Even when some pro heroes show up and mention that All Might is at another ambush site, while some of his classmates breathe a sigh of relief, Shouto is still unbearably anxious.

Don't get him wrong, he isn't arrogant enough to think he'd be any more help than the No. 1 hero, nor is he selfish enough to insist that he has to be the one to save Midoriya. He's glad that All Might is rescuing Midoriya. But there's still an apprehensive uneasiness, an inexplicable wariness that plagues him. Logically, Shouto knows that there's no place safer than by All Might's side. But he probably won't be able to breathe easily until he actually sees Midoriya safe and sound.

Shouto closes his eyes, trying to centre himself. His hands clench, the phantom sensation of having Midoriya in his arms still haunting him.

He's just about to resign himself and suggest they move out when it happens.

Someone. Something. Is *here*.

The unofficial rescue squad lean against the wall in frozen terror. Someone... something demolished the entire building, the pro heroes have been blown away like leaves, and they can't *breathe*.

It's like that time with Stain, only ten times worse. A malicious aura presses down on them, choking them, rooting their feet. Shouto knows they need to run away, but none of them, not him, not Uraraka, not even Bakugo can manage to take a single step.

Cold sweat drips down Shouto's neck as he barely manages to cran his head enough to peak through a crack in the wall.

Someone in a black suit and headgear is walking out of the ruins of the building.

But then he beckons with one hand, and a black substance appears in front of him.

A small figure burst out from the inky substance.

“Ahh. Welcome, Midoriya.”

—What?

Shouto’s eyes widen. Yes, that’s Midoriya. Coughing out black ink, dressed in different clothes, wounds healed, eyes bright with wild panic— it’s *Midoriya.*

Shouto had always wondered how Midoriya is always able to move when others are frozen in fear.

Now he understands.

If your fear for someone else is stronger than your fear for yourself, then Shouto can move too.

He’s about to run forward, all logic and rational thought abandoned in his instinctive and overpowering need to hold Midoriya, when a hand shoots out and grabs him.

Shouto looks over to find Yaoyorozu looking at him with pleading eyes.

She’s reaching over Uraraka to hold on to him, effectively trapping Uraraka too, who also seems to have been about to run off. On the other side, Shouto finds that Kirishima is holding on to Iida and Bakugo with both hands, going so far as to harden himself with his quirk to restrain them.

Yaoyorozu shakes her head, pleading with her eyes.

Shouto bites his lip.

He knows. He knows she’s right. They just saw what that man is capable of. They have no chance if they just blindly run up to him.

But Midoriya is there.

Shouto *has* to do something.

He *has* to.

*

SMASH!!!

Izuku shields his face against the blast of wind as All Might shoots down from the sky like a comet and slams into All For One.

Despite the situation, Izuku finds himself staring in awe as All Might and All For One exchange hits, meeting each other blow for blow. Out of the corner of his vision, he catches Shigaraki similarly entranced, his posture slack in near-disbelief at the sight of their respective mentors.

A clash of titans.

It's breathtaking in its fearsomeness.

"Let's go, Shigaraki!" Compress calls over the whipping wind. Both Izuku and Shigaraki start, coming back to their senses.

All For One had gathered all the members of the League along with Izuku. The villain has forced Kurogiri's warp gate open and provided them with an escape route. And with All Might occupied with All For One, the League only has to take Izuku with them to secure their victory.

Izuku gulps as the conscious members of the League all turn to face him. Even with Kurogiri and Dabi still knocked out cold, it's still six on one.

"...Take Midoriya. We're getting out of here."

Well, shit.

"Midoriya, my boy!" All Might calls urgently, but All For One takes advantage the moment the hero turns his head to Izuku to strike a devastating blow. All Might just barely manages to block it.

"Don't worry about me!" Izuku yells as he flips backwards with Full Cowl, narrowly avoiding Toga Himiko's knife. "I'll manage!"

Izuku isn't confident in his claim, but it's the least he can do for All Might. At this rate, he's going to be nothing but a distraction to All Might. And with Izuku in the vicinity, the hero can't even go all out.

He needs to get out of here. But the villains are desperate to catch him too.

What can he do?

*

“What can we do?!”

“We can’t fight—!”

“I know, so *what can we do?!”*

The students hiding behind the wall hiss furiously as they watch Midoriya evade the League of Villains. All Might and the masked villain are keeping each other busy, but that still leaves six villains chasing after Midoriya in a deadly game of tag.

Midoriya is just barely keeping out of reach, cleverly combining his quirk to evade the clutches of the villains or keep them away, but it’s only a matter of time before his stamina runs out or he makes a mistake.

Shouto clenches his fist.

What can they do?

*

Izuku *pulls* himself away from Magne as he *pushes* a burst of flames towards Compress, forcing the villain to jump away. With Kurogiri out of commission, Compress is the one he has to watch out for the most.

But that doesn’t mean the other villains are pushovers.

“Got him! ...Lost him!”

A strangled choke leaves Izuku’s mouth as Twice’s measuring tape wraps around his throat, but he manages to burn through it and free himself before the other villains can close in.

The villains are backed into a corner too. While before they’d wanted to keep Izuku’s injuries to a minimum so they could recruit him, even going so far as to heal his arms, now they’re prepared to take him by

force.

A flitting thought has Izuku baring his teeth in a grin.

Looks like he made the right choice when he knocked Dabi out.

He doesn't think the villain would have stood aside in this one.

*

"...What would Deku do?"

Shouto turns his eyes from watching Midoriya. The others all turn to Uraraka as well, and the girl raises her head to meet their gaze with steely eyes.

"Deku would have come up with a plan," she states, faith and conviction resounding in her words. "There must be a way we can help without breaking the rules. I refuse to believe there isn't. So think; what would Deku do?"

*

Izuku violently pivots to the side, just barely dodging Shigaraki's destructive fingers. Spinner and Compress are closing in on him from each side so he chooses the lesser of two evils and jumps towards Spinner. And then he kicks off the villain like a springboard, launching himself into the air.

He flares his fire like a shroud as he touches the ground again, trying to keep the villains at a distance.

Toga bursts through the flames, wielding her knife and maniac smile.

"Let's go, Izuku-kun!"

*

“Yaoyorozu, the next time Midoriya is sufficiently far from the villains, shoot up a flare to distract them. Uraraka, make the charge team light with your quirk—”

“Kirishima can break through the wall with his hardening! And then Iida’s engines and Bakugo’s blasts will give you momentum!”

“I’ll create a path with ice. And when we get high enough we have to call Midoriya...”

“You do it.”

Everyone pauses in their rapid planning and turn to look at Bakugo. Bakugo ignores them and stares at the person he singled out with unreadable red eyes.

“Deku will come whoever calls. But we can’t afford even a single moment of hesitation. So, you do it.”

*

A bright flare streaks across the sky.

“What?”

The villains are momentarily distracted, and in the chaos, something bursts out and flies over the battlefield.

“Huh?!”

“Is that—?!”

Izuku’s eyes are wide in shock as he sees people that shouldn’t be here. Is that— Iida? Bakugo? Kirishima too?

He, along with the League, is kind of gaping up in surprise when he spots Todoroki’s movement amidst the gang. Despite the distance, their eyes lock onto each other with unerring accuracy.

“Midoriya!”

Todoroki reaches out a hand to Izuku.

“Come!”

If it was anyone else, Izuku might have had thoughts like *what is going on,* or *how are they here,* or even just *what the fuck?*

But because it’s Todoroki, none of those thoughts even register in Izuku’s mind.

Todoroki is calling him.

Then Izuku can’t but answer.

There’s no hesitation or even time for conscious thought when Izuku *pulls* himself and *pushes* with fire while leaping with Full Cowl.

Just like that first time at the Sports Festival, he takes Todoroki’s hand, and Todoroki pulls him up.

Izuku laughs, wild and disbelieving.

“How would I do without you?”

Todoroki has a strange expression on his face, like he wants to laugh and cry at the same time.

“That’s the wrong question,” he whispers, but his words are lost in the whistling wind.

Mt. Lady and Gran Torino fend off the League, and at last they’re able to dash away from the battleground. The group skid to a stop in an abandoned alley, panting for breath.

“Deku!”

Izuku turns at the call to find Uraraka and Yaoyorozu rushing towards them. Only then does Izuku get a chance to properly look at the people who saved him.

Todoroki, Uraraka, Iida, Bakugo, Kirishima...

Oh.

They’re the ones who saw that video call.

They’re the ones who *know.*

Izuku gulps.

“I…”

He can’t dare say a word to them.

The fear and anxiety that had been forgotten in the moment rush back like a tidal wave, crashing into him with enough force to knock him unsteady. Izuku knows his friends are good people. But what if— *what if?* He kept this a secret from them for so long, and this isn’t just a *small* secret either, what will they think of him for keeping this from them, what will they think of him for being the son of a—

Uraraka lets out a sob. And then, she throws herself at Izuku.

Izuku just barely manages to catch her, stumbling a little in surprise. Uraraka doesn’t ask him any questions, doesn’t accuse him of anything, doesn’t reject him. She just wraps her arms around his torso and hugs him *tight*.

“I’m *so glad* you’re okay,” she sobs.

And suddenly, Izuku feels like he could cry too.

Somethings tugs gently at his hand, and Izuku looks down to find that he’s still holding Todoroki’s hand. Todoroki uses it to pull Izuku (and Uraraka, who’s still hanging onto him for dear life) closer to him, then he snakes his other arm around Izuku’s waist, hugging him from behind. He drops his head on Izuku’s shoulder.

Iida lets out a large sniffle (and is that a fake moustache?) and uses his larger body to his advantage to fling his arms around all three of them and just hug them all.

Kirishima laughs out loud, pulling Yaoyorozu and a grumbling Bakugo into the group hug as well.

They’re a mess of limbs, shaking from sobs and laughter, but not even Bakugo tries to pull away.

Izuku stands there, speechless, astonished, sandwiched and surrounded and embraced by his friends.

They don’t ask about Hisashi.

They don’t *care* about Hisashi.

They only came for *Izuku.*

Izuku feels like his heart is swelling to the bursting. He feels like he could laugh and cry for days. He feels, he feels...

Izuku squeezes his hands and arms, and the hand in his squeezes back and the arms around him tighten their hold. He finally lets himself relax for the first time since the villains showed up at the camp three days ago.

He smiles.

"Thank you."

*

"Those brats," Gran Torino shakes his head. "I'm betting your recklessness rubbed off Midoriya, and *his* recklessness rubbed off *them.* It's a vicious cycle."

That teases a tight smile out of Toshinori despite the situation.

Both Midoriya and Shigaraki's gang have escaped, leaving only Toshinori and Gran Torino facing against All For One. The two stand opposed to the villain and raise their fists.

The villain tips his head to the side. It's hard to tell what he's thinking with that mask covering his face, but his words and tone are as condescending as they were six years ago.

"I only came to save Tomura, but if you want a fight, then I can only reciprocate. After all, I despise you."

Toshinori bristles at those words.

"Is that why you took young Midoriya? To hurt me?"

All For One hums at Toshinori's accusation.

"It was actually Tomura who suggested it, not I."

The villain idly flicks one hand to the side.

“Tomura is still much like a child. While that means he has the potential to grow, it also means he can be stubborn and impulsive. But children oft grow defiant if you tell them no. So I let him do as he pleased. The plan to recruit that violent friend along with him was actually quite ingenious, if only it had worked. If nothing else, Midoriya is the type of person who can’t leave someone behind, and the Bakugo child would have been an excellent shackle.”

“As young Midoriya already said, young Bakugo would *never* be a villain,” All Might defends. All For One merely shrugs.

“Perhaps. But regardless, the plan failed, and the Vanguard Action Squad could only secure Midoriya. Tomura and the others may have hoped to coerce him into vigilantism, but I knew better. I’ve seen eight generations worth of wielders of One For All, after all, and Midoriya Izuku is cut from very much the same cloth. He would rather break than bend.”

“So what, this was all just some convoluted lesson for your protégé?” Gran Torino spits.

“Oh no,” All For One denies airily. “It was also to let Tomura get acquainted with the next wielder of One For All. Having a decent adversary can be motivating, after all. I would know.”

And then, despite the lack of a visible face, All For One spears the two heroes with a piercing gaze. His tone cools and pools like acid.

“Though eight generations worth *is* a little too persistent. So, you asked if taking Midoriya was personal? If it was to *hurt* you?”

And again, somehow they can feel the wide grin stretching across the villain’s lips without even seeing it.

“Yes. Yes it was.”

*

But even with All For One doing his utmost hardest to shatter his resolve, even when his true form is revealed to the world, All Might is still the No. 1 hero. He is still the symbol of peace. He is still the pillar of hope.

And he will not crumble.

“In a way, I am grateful for this fight. I’m grateful that it’s *me* here fighting you, not young Midoriya. I’m grateful for this chance to end the cycle before it reaches him. I’m grateful I haven’t failed my successor yet. And I will end you, right here, right now, so that you can never lay a single finger on my boy again. So that you can never lay *sight* on him again.”

*

And true to that promise, soon All Might stands on the ruins of Kamino Ward with a defeated All For One at his feet.

He thinks of All For One. He thinks of One For All. He thinks of his successor. He thinks of his boy.

He points into the camera, and he says:

“You’re next.”

The public explodes.

While the crowd roars and cheers, taking his message to be addressed to the villain populace, the students who formed the rescue squad turn to look at Midoriya.

Midoriya Izuku is staring up at the screen with tears streaming down his face and his hand clutching his chest over his heart, but his back is straight and his head is held high.

And they know, in that moment, *exactly* who All Might’s message was for.

Just like the whole world will, soon.

*

https://www.youtube.com/watch = allmightsepicspeech

[All Might's Epic Speech – Kamino Ward]

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Comments

Internet: the Stain vid will be the most epic thing this year

All Might: Hold my beer

OMG that was fucking ICONIC

CHILLS

I legit cried when I first saw this

It gets me so pumped up just listening to this, imagine what it'd be like if you're a villain and are on the receiving end of this

What a time to be alive

Hi, don't mind me, I'm just here for my daily dose of watch-and-bawl-my-eyes-out.

Am I the only one that's getting deja vu for some reason?

↳ omg me too!

↳ I thought I was the only weird one lol

↳ but I mean like who would be dumb enough to copy AM's speech so soon?

↳ IT'S THE OTHER WAY AROUND

https://www.youtube.com/watch = allmightmidoriyasidebyside

↳ omgomgomgomgomg

↳ OMG THIS IS RAD

↳ I KNEW I heard this somewhere!

↳ wait, but what does this mean???

*

https://www.youtube.com/watch = allmightmidoriyasidebyside

[All Might and Midoriya Izuku Speech Side by Side Comparison: We're Next/You're Next]

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Comments

This is real this is real this is real this is real

aaahhhhhhhh

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

Did All Might just appoint his heir on live television???

Since Midoriya said “we” as in the students of UA, Allmight could just mean the next generation of heroes

↳ yeah, except he used “you (君, singular)” not “you (君たち, plural)” so.....

I still think AM was talking to the villains.

OMG when I first saw allmight’s speech i thought it was for the villains, but putting it side by side with midorima makes so much more sense!!

↳ It’s Midoriya, not Midorima.

This is so crazy that it might be real. I mean, Allmight teaches at UA and Mido goes there, so you KNOW that THEY know each other

This is monumental. It would make sense if someone else copied All Might’s speech as a homage to the hero. But it was the other way around. Midoriya did the “We’re next” first at the UA Sports Festival, and we all know that All Might HAD to have seen/heard that because he’s a teacher there. That means ALL MIGHT parodied the speech of MIDORIYA. That’s the No.1 hero making tribute to a mere 1st grade high school student, folks. If that isn’t significant as f*ck, I don’t know what is...

Read more

Chapter End Notes

I was sorely tempted to name this chapter “Forged in the Heart of

a Dying Star" but refrained because 1) I couldn't give up on the We're Next/You're Next parallels and 2) because Marvel references might seem too nerdy (says the person who shamelessly ripped off Naruto and Katekyo Hitman Reborn moves) and 3) Infinity War is still Too Soon.

That said, I'm sorry, but this had to be done.

Izuku: All Might? I don't feel so good.
AFO snaps and inks Izuku away
All Might:

Regarding Hisashi. I took care to never refer Inko & Hisashi as wife/husband, and to never call Hisashi a "Midoriya." Because, in this AU, he never was. He lived with them, yes. He's Izuku's biological father, yes. But Hisashi and Inko never married (I know couples in real life who've been together for years and have kids but have never legally registered marriage). And that's how no one made the connection between them.

I love how, following the Izuku Headbang, the catchphrase "life isn't fair & it certainly isn't kind" has become so integrated into the BYW comments section.

Thanks for waiting, and have a great new year! *Izuku headbang*

Sugar and Spice, and Everything Nice

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait. In compensation, I give you... dorm shenanigans! Fluff! ALL THE FLUFF!!! *throws confetti in the air*

Thank you, as always, for your wonderful art.

Shouto crowning fire-angel Izuku with an ice halo by apassingwolf: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/182840275759/apassingwolf-so-like-i-made-this-account

"Because life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind" by mycursivebullshit: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/182311699419/because-life-isnt-fair-and-it-certainly-isnt

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aizawa is aware of the fact that the homeroom teachers of Class A and B couldn't be more different.

He's cool where Vlad King is hot. He's bland when Vlad is lively. He's rational to Vlad's emotional.

It's something of a running joke among the teachers. Which is why it's surprising when, for once, Aizawa finds that it's *Vlad* trying to talk reason and *him* acting on instinct.

Yamada would have a field day if he knew.

Aizawa doesn't fucking care.

After gritting his teeth and getting through the press conference, he'd been watching the Kamino broadcast with Nezu and Vlad. And now that the fight is over, the dust has cleared, and All Might pointed into the camera and declared "*You're next*," Aizawa doesn't even pause to consider what those potent words might mean. He springs up from his seat and rushes for the door.

Because the Kamino raid being over means only one thing to him right now.

Midoriya.

Vlad tries to stop Aizawa from leaving the room.

“Wait, Eraser! I know you’re worried, but we don’t even know the situation yet! We should stay here and be on stand by!”

Aizawa doesn’t even dignify that with a response. He dodges Vlad’s hand as he undoes his tie (he never liked the thing anyway) and uses it as a pseudo capture weapon to deftly bind Vlad’s wrist to the doorknob. (Midoriya isn’t the only one who can improvise. If his problem child can tie down Bakugo with a sling one-handed, then Aizawa can restrain another pro hero with a fucking tie.) The knot is too tight and intricate for Vlad to be able to undo on his own, and while the hero could rip the door off, he probably won’t want to damage public property.

Vlad is still shouting at Aizawa in an attempt to stop him. In contrast, Nezu doesn’t even try. The Principle just sighs, then gives Aizawa a resigned but fond smile and waves him off.

Reassured that the Principle won’t untie Vlad for the time being, Aizawa gives a curt nod.

And then he *runs*.

Aizawa’s contacts and status as a hero and teacher let him know the precise moment Midoriya steps foot in the police station, and he rushes there with all the desperation he felt that night on the summer camp. (Was that really only three days ago?)

When he gets there, though, Midoriya isn’t the only one of his students he finds.

“…What.”

The students cringe at Aizawa’s flat voice.

Iida and Yaoyorozu (the class President and Vice President, for fuck’s sake) at least have the decency to lower their heads in shame in the face of Aizawa’s disapproval, but they tellingly don’t take even a step away from where they’re crowding around Midoriya like some protective barrier. Kirishima scratches the back of his neck and Bakugo hunches his shoulders but sticks out his chin. Uraraka has her arms wrapped tightly around Midoriya’s right arm and is clinging to him like some particularly vicious koala, and Todoroki is holding Midoriya’s left hand in what looks like a death grip.

Midoriya gives Aizawa a sheepish smile while the others avoid his eyes.

Aizawa stares disbelievingly at his students.

“You didn’t.”

The kids minus Midoriya shuffle guilty but stay stubbornly silent.

They totally did.

Aizawa pinches the bridge of his nose.

“...I wish I could say I’m surprised,” he finally sighs. “We’ll talk about your behaviour later. But for now, the rest of you go home so Midoriya can get checked up.”

“We want to stay—!”

Aizawa glares with just the slightest flash of red in his eyes. That shuts up the kids, but they’re still clustered around Midoriya like a pack of puppies with separation anxiety or something.

Which, to be fair, is understandable considering... everything. But rules are there for a reason, and as their teacher, he needs to put his foot down. There’s been enough drama for one night.

It’s Midoriya who eventually convinces them to leave. The kid quietly thanks the others, reassures them he’ll be fine, and gently nudges them along their way. It’s only then that the kids reluctantly start to head home. (Aizawa wonders if he should be more concerned about the fact that his students are more willing to listen to another student than their teacher.) (But then again, it’s Midoriya.)

Kirishima grins and fist bumps Midoriya, Yaoyorozu murmurs a few words to him and lays a hand on his arm, Bakugo bumps his shoulder against Midoriya without looking at him as he passes by, and Iida and Uraraka throw their arms around Midoriya in a hug one last time. (No one seems to have the heart to tell Iida that he still has a fake moustache. Aizawa is just... not even going to ask why the kid has it in the first place.) By the end of it all, Midoriya looks a little dazed at all the care and affection showered on him.

Todoroki is the last one to leave. His grip on Midoriya’s hand tightens before reluctantly loosening. Considering that Aizawa heard Midoriya was kidnapped while Todoroki was holding onto him, he can

understand the fear and reluctance to separate again.

Perhaps sensing the same thing, Midoriya jostles the other boy and gives him a small smile.

“I’m sorry I lost your shirt,” he says out of the blue.

Todoroki blinks. And then he lets out a sound that’s almost a choked laugh. Miodriya’s smile turns victorious as the air is lightened.

“I’m sorry I lost *you,*” Todoroki whispers back.

Even with the mood lightened a bit, Todoroki still hesitates to leave. Midoriya looks like he wants to roll his eyes.

“I know what you’re thinking, but stop worrying. I’m at the police station. I’ll survive without my villain deterrent.”

Todoroki shoots Midoriya a distrustful look, and instead, turns to face Aizawa.

“He’s villain catnip,” he says as if that explains everything. (Midoriya mutters “I am *not,*” under his breath.)

Aizawa sighs. As much as he feels like he’s suffocating under all this—there’s no other word for it—*fluff,* he just nods and tells Todoroki what he wants to hear.

“I’ll keep him safe.”

Todoroki’s shoulders slag minutely in relief. He bows his head slightly to Aizawa, exchanges one last look with Midoriya, and then he too leaves.

And now it’s just Aizawa and Midoriya left in the lobby of the police station.

“Erase... Aizawa-sensei,” Midoriya starts nervously. (And there’s that slip again.) The kid’s eyes are darting around, as if he’s not sure what to say. This is the first time they’re seeing each other properly since the summer camp, and the revelation since then has thrown a wrench in their relationship. Which hadn’t been exactly normal even before all this.

Frankly, Aizawa isn’t sure what to say either. (What even is the right thing to say to your student who’s been kidnapped and who you’ve also found out is the abused son of a villain you caught a decade ago?)

(Are you alright? What happened? How are your injuries? I'm sorry I couldn't save you sooner? What did the villains do to you? Why were the others here? Your mother told me about your father? I'm sorry I didn't realize earlier? I'm just *so glad* you're safe?)

Eventually, it's Midoriya who breaks the silence.

"They... they won't be in trouble, will they?"

Aizawa stares.

His problem child has been brutally beaten by villains, kidnapped for three days, had his life story unwittingly exposed, and has just barely been rescued. And the first things out of his mouth is a concern for others.

This kid.

"Please, sensei," Midoriya looks up at him earnestly when Aizawa's silence stretches. "They were careful not to engage in combat. They only wanted to help... to *save* me. Please don't say that saving someone is ever the wrong thing to do."

And that, coming from Midoriya to Aizawa when now both of them know their shared history... that hits hard.

Aizawa sighs.

"I'll give them a stern talking to, but none of them will be severely punished," he admits. Midoriya looks so *relieved* at those words that Aizawa feels his heart clench.

"...More importantly," the hero (the teacher) (the man who's claimed Midoriya Izuku *his* in some way) plops his palm on top of Midoriya's head.

The kid looks up at him with wide green eyes, and Aizawa just *gives up.*

There had been so many things he'd wanted to say.

But when he looks at Midoriya now... all of that falls away.

As much as it's become something of a habit for him to pat Midoriya's head, this time, instead of awkwardly patting that fluffy hair he slides the hand down to the back of Midoriya's head. And he pulls.

Midoriya makes a soft, surprised sound as he's pulled face first into Aizawa's chest. His problem child stiffens for a moment as Aizawa wraps his other arm around his shoulders.

But a stiff moment later, Midoriya *melts* into the embrace.

Aizawa rests his chin on top of Midoriya's head as the kid starts trembling. He feels Midoriya's hands come up to tentatively clutch the back of Aizawa's suit.

"Eraserhead," Midoriya gasps his name in a breath that's not quite a sob but *almost*. "I... you... Thank you *so much* for coming."

Aizawa isn't sure if Midoriya means right now, or when they met that night at the summer camp, or ten years ago when Aizawa unknowingly arrested Midoriya's father. Whichever it is, Aizawa doesn't feel like he deserves thanks. Because he'd been too late every single time.

But that's not what Midoriya needs to hear right now, and frankly, that's not what Aizawa wants to say the most either.

He gives up all pretence and just hugs his problem child *tight*.

"Thank you for holding out. For enduring," he returns instead, and he ignores the way his own voice cracks. Just like with Midoroya, Aizawa's not sure if he means the past few days or the past few years. Probably both. "You did good, Midoriya. You did good."

*

Aizawa and the police escort Izuku home. What with getting debriefed and checked up at the hospital, it's well past midnight by the time he arrives. But Inko still meets them at the doorstep.

Izuku is startled when the door slams open as soon as Aizawa rings the doorbell—Inko must have *pulled* with her quirk—as his mother is usually so cautious and quiet in her movements.

Smothering their sound and presence to the point of being almost silent is a habit both Izuku and Inko gained from their days with Hisashi and hadn't been able to lose since. But even that ingrained

habit seems to be thrown out the window in Inko's desperation.

Izuku wonders if it's weird for him to find that touching.

He steps out from behind Aizawa.

As soon as she catches sight of her son, Inko looks like she's about to cry.

They've always cared for each other, but they've never been physically intimate. This is another habit born from their days with Hisashi, when Izuku was always wounded and Inko didn't want to hurt her son more by hugging him and aggravating his injuries.

Izuku, who's received several *amazing* hugs from various people recently, decides that this habit can go ahead and be thrown out the window too.

He hesitantly opens his arms and gives his mother a tentative smile.

Inko clasps her hands to her mouth when she recognizes the gesture. And then, she flings both her arms around Izuku.

"Welcome home, darling," Inko sobs.

Izuku buries his face in his mother's shoulder.

"I'm home, Mom."

*

It's only a bit over a full day later when Aizawa visits the Midoriya residence again, this time with All Might in tow.

Inko has told Izuku that the two heroes had visited while he'd been kidnapped. (And he couldn't help but notice how Inko consistently referred to Aizawa as "Eraserhead" and not by his name or even "your homeroom teacher." It seems that, much like Izuku himself, she still sees Aizawa as a hero first and Izuku's teacher second.)

All Might has one arm in a cast and is partially mummified, but he still draws Izuku into a fierce hug the moment he opens the door. They had talked over the phone yesterday, but this is the first time

seeing his mentor in person since Kamino. Izuku swallows thickly when All Might whispers *"my boy"* against his ear, and gives a tremulous smile as he leads the two inside.

The two heroes are seated at the coffee table once again, with Inko on the other side. The three adults get a strange sense of déjà vu as Inko pours them tea. But this time, Izuku is right beside her, and the topic they've come to discuss is much brighter.

Once again, it's Aizawa who takes the lead.

"Thank you for having us. I'll get straight to the point. As we've already told you over the phone yesterday, UA is looking to change into a boarding school. We'll be going around to the families of the other students in the following days, but we think it's best for Midoriya to come into the dormitories as early as possible. Today, even."

All Might nods and picks up where Aizawa left.

"I've heard that heroes and the police are watching your home, but young Midoriya has already been made an explicit target by the villains."

(Not to mention the general public too, thanks to his declaration of "You're next." In all honesty, All Might hadn't expected anyone but Midoriya himself to realize what his message truly meant.) (Gran Tornio had chewed him out in the hospital as soon as All Might regained consciousness. "What were you thinking? That's right, you *weren't* thinking. You might as well have just declared him your heir on live television. Oh wait! You already did!") (Tsukauchi's sympathetic but resigned smile had only been marginally better than Gran Torino's biting sarcasm. "Just be vague and deflect when anyone asks you directly. It's the media; it'll die down eventually if there's nothing new to feed it.") (So they hoped.)

"With all the attention on him, the safest place for him now is within UA."

Especially when All Might himself can no longer protect his boy.

The two Midoriya's are quiet for a moment before one of them answers.

"I've thought about it, and I understand your reasoning, but… I'm against it."

All Might and Aizawa came here expecting opposition, of course. UA hasn't been able to protect their student, and now that they know the family's history with villains, it's not too far a stretch to think that Inko would have lost faith in UA or even want Izuku to give up on being a hero altogether.

But the thing is, it's not Inko who said those words.

It's Izuku.

"Honey...?"

Inko looks at her son in surprise. They hadn't discussed this beforehand, so it's only natural she's shocked. Going to UA has always been Izuku's dream, doubly so because of both All Might and Eraserhead's ties with the school, and no one knows that better than Inko.

But Izuku has something to protect.

"If I'm a target, I'm not the only one who's in danger." Izuku looks at Inko imploringly. "I can't leave you here alone."

Inko's eyes widen, though in retrospect, she shouldn't have been surprised. Izuku has always, *always* tried to protect her, after all. Even at the cost of himself.

And that's the problem.

"Oh Izuku," she breathes. "You can't protect me forever." When Izuku looks like he's going to rebut and refuse that, she shakes her head and rephrases. "You *shouldn't* protect me forever."

That stops him. Protecting his mother is the first motivation Izuku had felt, the defining moment of his life, and though he knows he was never enough, that he only ever made her cry, but still—

He has no idea what expression is on his face, but Inko shakes her head at the sight of it.

"No, darling," she says. "You... you *did* protect me. But the thing is, Izuku, you never should have had to. I should have protected you. And I am *so sorry* I couldn't. I'm so sorry you felt like you had to protect me. I'm so sorry that even now, you're still protecting me."

The string of apologies makes Izuku wince. But Inko doesn't end it at

that this time. She clasps her hands together and looks at Izuku.

“But Izuku, I… I know I’m too late, but now, *I* want to protect *you.* At the very least, I want to protect your dream.”

“I… I don’t…”

I don’t *understand.*

Inko gives him a watery smile.

“Honey, you didn’t tell me you even applied to UA until *after* you got in.”

All Might makes a stifled sound of surprise and Aizawa visibly stiffens at that revelation.

“I think I know why. You probably didn’t want to let me down in case you didn’t get in, right? You were trying to protect me, even from my own disappointment. I know I’m not the best to judge, but honey, that’s not healthy.”

Inko takes in a deep breath. She has always loved her son. Even during the worst days with Hisashi, Izuku was the one good thing in her life.

All Might may have claimed Izuku as *his boy* and Aizawa dubbed him *his problem child,* even if Inko doesn’t know it.

But Izuku is Inko’s *world.*

“Some part of me wishes you won’t become a hero,” she admits. “I know it’s selfish when we ourselves were saved by a hero, but the Kamino broadcast showed just how much heroes get hurt. I don’t want you to hurt anymore. But… but I know it’s your dream, and I can never oppose what you want to do. And I can’t protect you from harm, not like you did for me, but I’ll do whatever I can to at least protect your dream.”

It breaks her apart. A child shouldn’t have to protect their parent, shouldn’t ever feel like they even have to in the first place. It’s her job as a mother to protect her son, and yet Izuku has been trying to protect her for all these years. It breaks her, it tears her apart, and now that Hisashi is gone she just wants it all to be *over.*

But her guilt insures that she can never deny Izuku what he wants.

Even though being a hero means that Izuku will undoubtedly be hurt again, she has no right to stop him.

So she'll do whatever she can to at least lessen his burden.

Inko gently reaches out to take Izuku's hand. They've consciously been initiating more physical contact with each other since Izuku came back, and when Inko squeezes Izuku's hand it somehow conveys her earnestness.

"I don't ever want to hold you back. Not anymore. So don't worry about me; the police said they'll keep an eye on me. What will make me the happiest is seeing *you* happy, and for that you need to follow your dream. At UA, with All Might and Eraserhead. With your friends."

Izuku swallows thickly.

"...But then what about you?" he whispers. Hisashi is gone and Bakugo Mitsuki has been Inko's steadfast friend, but Izuku and Inko have always been together. They have always had each other. "I... I know I was never enough, that I couldn't save you, let alone protect you, but..."

"Oh Izuku." The smile Inko gives him is pained and loving and regretful and grateful all at the same time.

"You were always my hero."

At those five words, Izuku's breath catches.

Izuku had always been haunted by memories of his father's laugh and his mother's sobs. He could never regret trying to protect his mother, but the guilt of not being enough had always weighed down on him. He'd tried to protect her, but he'd never been able to save her. She had always cried. She had always apologized.

Oh Izuku, Inko had sobbed. *I'm so, so sorry.*

No Mom, Izuku had thought. *Don't be sorry. What I wanted you to say was...*

And Izuku isn't even sure what he wanted to hear anymore. Thank you? It's alright? You can be a hero? He doesn't know. He doesn't remember. Too much time had passed. Too many tears had been spilt.

But now, Inko is telling him *you were always my hero.*

And with those five simple words, everything becomes *worth it.*

“Oh,” Izuku breathes.

Inko smiles at him, and her green eyes are shining bright with unshed tears but her tone is firm in a way it hasn’t been ever before.

“You’re too *good* for your own good,” she sighs softly. “The only way you’ll be happy is if you’re doing your best to help people. I can’t, I won’t stop you. But promise me that you’ll take care of yourself too. For my sake, if not yours.”

You can’t save anyone if you don’t save yourself first, Aizawa’s words echo in Izuku’s mind.

“...Okay,” Izuku whispers.

Inko squeezes their hands. “Good. Then it’s decided.”

A sniffle suddenly echoes in the room, and both Midoriyas turn their heads to the sound and remember with a jolt that they’re not, in fact, alone. All Might seems to be trying to keep in his tears at the emotional display going on. Aizawa has a painfully awkward expression at getting a front row seat to the family drama he’s unknowingly contributed to a decade ago.

Izuku gives them a sheepish grin.

“So, um. I guess I’m going to the dorms...?” he hastily concludes for them.

Aizawa looks just so *relieved* to be freed from all this drama. All Might sniffles again. Inko hands him a wad of tissue and pats his hand.

Izuku smiles at them.

*

He only allows himself to break down when he’s safely alone in his new dorm room later that day.

“How did you do it?” Izuku whispers into his phone.

He and Todoroki have been texting more and more frequently but this is the first time either of them has called. Some part of Izuku thinks maybe this should feel more awkward, but it only feels natural.

“I know our situations are different,” he continues, and it’s true. Todoroki and his mother had not been able to talk about what happened between them for a decade because they’d been physically separated. Izuku and Inko hadn’t talked about what happened for a decade either, but they’d always at least been together.

It’s different, but it’s still similar enough.

“I just… I don’t know. We never really talked about it. It’s not something you just bring up. So I’ve always thought… but she said…”

He’s rambling, he knows. But somehow, as he’s always done, Todoroki *understands.*

Todoroki, they’re both aware, isn’t exactly the best person to ask for advice on healthy, normal social interactions. But he still has seniority over Izuku in this whole ‘reconciling with your mother over shared trauma after ten years’ business.

The other boy makes a “hmm” sound over the line, and Izuku can picture the way he must be tapping a finger on his knee. He fiercely wishes they were talking face to face, like that time on the bunk bed of the Hosu hospital, or when they sat side by side that night during the summer camp.

“I just… How did you do it?” he finds himself repeating helplessly.

“I think,” Todoroki eventually starts slowly, “what mattered in the end was that we still loved each other. That alone isn’t enough, of course. Just because you love someone doesn’t mean everything they do to you is alright. But… it means that you can still try.”

Todoroki and his mother loved each other, but they had also undoubtedly hurt each other. The mere sight of her son’s left side tormented Rei, and she eventually poured boiling water over him.

Izuku loved his mother, yes, but that doesn’t mean it didn’t *hurt* when she screamed at him. He’s still traumatized to this day by the sound of her screams. And apparently, Inko had also been hurt by the way Izuku kept things from her in an attempt to protect her. Even with a

solid decade of peace without Hisashi, they had been too hurt and afraid to really talk and work through it all together.

But in the end, they still care enough that they can look past the hurt. They still love enough to try to reach out to each other.

“You’re right,” Izuku murmurs. “Yeah. That’s… okay. Yeah.”

He huffs a laugh. “Thanks again. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“…It’s the other way around,” Todoroki says quietly after a beat.

“Hm?”

“…Nothing. I’ll tell you sometime later.”

Izuku nods even though Todoroki can’t see him over the phone.

“If you say so. But really. Thank you. Even if we’re not exactly the same, it… helps, knowing you’re not alone.”

“…Yeah. I know.”

*

Shouto had always wanted to be a hero.

Izuku had always wanted to be a hero.

Rei, Shouto’s mother, had hugged him and assured *you can be a hero.*

Inko, Izuku’s mother, had kneeled in front of him and cried *I’m so sorry.*

When Shouto was five, his father Enji started “training” him.

When Izuku was three, his father Hisashi started beating his mother.

Rei tried to stop Enji, but the man just hit her.

Izuku tried to stop Hisashi, but the man just hit him.

That blow broke Rei.

That blow made Izuku.

Rei fell to the ground, all the pain and fear making her crumble and fold.

Izuku stood his ground, all the pain and adrenaline making him bare his teeth.

And Rei poured boiling water at the sight of her son.

And Inko screamed at the sight of fire coming from her son.

Shouto was traumatized.

Izuku was traumatized.

At the age of five, Shouto's mother was abruptly sent away, leaving him with his father.

At the age of five, Izuku's father was abruptly arrested, leaving him and his mother alone.

Shouto swore to never use his fire.

Izuku swore to never use his fire.

But.

When Shouto turned fifteen and met Izuku, he accepted his fire and talked to his mother.

When Izuku turned fifteen and met Shouto, he accepted his fire and talked to his mother.

Rei told her son she was sorry, and Shouto was able to find peace.

Inko also told her son she was sorry. But Izuku could not find peace.

Because that had never been what Izuku wanted her to say.

But then Inko takes her son's hands, looks him in the eye, and tells him, *you were always my hero.*

And with those words, everything becomes *worth it.*

*

The rest of Class 1-A arrive at the Heights Alliance dormitories in a few days. Aizawa meets them outside, but Izuku is instructed to wait in the lobby. (Izuku suspects it has to do with the "stern talking to" that Aizawa mentioned. He doesn't like the fact that his friends are in trouble for saving him, but at least Aizawa promised that they won't be punished for it.)

When the other students finally come in, Izuku swallows down his nerves and goes to greet them. This is the first time he's meeting all of them after Kamino, after all.

Izuku tries to smile brightly.

"Welcome home!"

Class 1-A pause for a moment, staring at him. The Deku Rescue Squad (Kirishima's words, not his) hadn't asked anything, but Izuku knows the class must want explanations. He's seen the various news articles and speculations that had come out about him over the past few days —ranging from hilariously off the mark to dangerously close to the truth—and his classmates are bound to be wondering the same things as what feels like the entire world.

Izuku sees Kaminari open his mouth and mentally braces himself for the questions.

But then—

"I'm home, honey!" Kirishima responds loudly as he slings an arm around Izuku's shoulders. He then proceeds to drag Izuku inside the dorms, chattering animatedly in his ear about the facilities with just a tad too much vigour to be genuine.

Izuku crans his neck back around to see Kaminari hiss in pain as Jiro stabs his side with her earphone jack.

"What? I wasn't going to ask about— Ow! Stop it!"

And then Izuku is dragged away before he can hear more.

This strange awkwardness continues on throughout the tour of the

building. Sato and Sero give him the customary 'pat Midoriya down to check if he's really okay after a big incident' routine but their classmates are noticeably refraining from asking Izuku about, well, *anything*. Considering that they had no qualms with the Stain video (outside of being sensitive with Iida's situation) this is... strange, to say the least.

So when the students finally break up to unpack their things, Izuku hesitates in front of his room. Todoroki, who's been assigned to the room on Izuku's right, sees him and quirks an eyebrow.

He opens the door to his room and gestures inside with a questioning look.

"You know me too well," Izuku smiles ruefully as he gratefully steps inside. Todoroki follows in and closes the door behind them.

"What's the matter?"

"I was hoping you could tell me. Do you know why everyone's acting so... weird?" Izuku gestures vaguely. "I was expecting people to ask questions, but it looks like they're actively trying not to."

Todoroki nods.

"It was Uraraka and Yaoyorozu's idea. Right before we came inside the dorms, we all agreed not to ask you about Kamino. You already have the whole world on your case; we don't need to add to that. And besides, it's not like it changes how we think of you."

Oh. That's... really, really kind of them all. But...

Izuku swallows.

"But... what about you guys? You... you heard about... my father." He winces even as he says the words. "I'm not even sure how many people were there, but you... you guys should have questions. I hid the fact that my father is a *villain*. I... you..."

Todoroki stops Izuku's faltering words by placing a hand on his shoulder. Izuku only realizes that his head had unconsciously lowered when he has to raise his gaze to meet Todoroki's eyes.

The mismatched eyes that look straight at him are as clear and warm as ever.

“The students who were there were me, Iida, Uraraka, Bakugo, and Kirishima. If you want to talk about it, we’re here for you. But if you don’t, that’s fine too. As I said, it doesn’t change how we think of you.” Todoroki pauses, then squeezes his hand. “It doesn’t change what you mean to us. To me.”

Izuku looks up at Todoroki with wide watery eyes.

He’s so *blessed* to have these people around him.

“How do you always make me feel better with just a few words?” he wonders. “You’re amazing.”

For some reason, a faint dusting of pink appears on Todoroki’s cheeks.

“How do you keep saying things like that with a straight face?” Todoroki groans as he draws back a step and covers his face with both his hands.

Izuku blinks. He doesn’t get it. If anything, Todoroki is worse than him.

He looks around the room for something to change the subject.

“Do you want help unpacking? I’m already done, so I have plenty of time.”

That gets Todoroki to lift his face from his hands.

“If you don’t mind, then I’d appreciate it.” He opens one packing box to reveal tatami mats inside. “With you, we’ll be able to finish well before dinner.”

Izuku stares.

“…You brought tatami with you.” He’s not sure if it’s a question or a disbelieving statement.

Todoroki shrugs. “My home is Japanese styled,” he says as if that explains everything.

Izuku stares some more.

“…You really are amazing,” he ends up saying.

He doesn’t quite mean it the same way as he did before.

*

Their other classmates are just as incredulous at Todoroki's reformed room.

"Is this even possible?!" Sero gapes at the changed flooring.

"Midoriya helped," Todoroki shrugs.

"Speaking of Midoriya..." Ashido grins mischievously and runs off to the room next doors and throws open Izuku's door. Izuku eeps in embarrassment as their classmates pour inside.

"Hm. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't... this," Tokoyami comments. "It feels a bit... bare?"

Izuku's room is nowhere near as sparse as Shoji's minimalist room, but it only has what's essential. The Midoriya's have never been ones to indulge—first because Inko and Izuku were too terrified of Hisashi to risk doing anything that might set him off, and then because they couldn't afford much with only Inko's income—so Izuku keeps his room fairly Spartan.

With a few exceptions, of course.

A few All Might posters hang proudly on the walls. But what draws his classmates' eyes is the one printed out picture that hangs in the place of honour amidst them. It's grainy and low quality, faded and frayed with old age, but lovingly preserved and framed.

"Is that... is that Aizawa-sensei?"

Izuku buries his face in his hands.

"Wow. Look how faded it is! How old is this, Midoriya?"

"...Ten years..." Izuku mumbles into his hands, and Kirishima whistles.

"Talk about dedication! I'm impressed."

"Wait, so you knew Aizawa-sensei before UA?"

"Um." Izuku pauses at that question.

Todoroki said it's okay not to talk about it if he doesn't want to, and Izuku... Izuku believes him. Miraculously, Izuku believes him.

So when he opens his mouth, it isn't because he's afraid of what they'll think of him for hiding things from them, or because they deserve to know, or because he feels an obligation.

It's because he wants to.

"Eraserhead saved me and my mother when I was little," he says, and the words come out of him surprisingly easily.

Some of Class A exclaim in surprise at the connection. But Izuku sees Todoroki, Iida, Uraraka, and Kirishima's eyes widen in understanding.

"Wait, is this that bouncy ball Aizawa-sensei threw at you on our first day of class?!"

"Oh my god, seriously?"

Izuku's ears flush, but he grins and shrugs helplessly. "I asked. He said I could keep it."

Sero bursts out laughing at Izuku's fanboying, while some of the girls make their way over to his bed where the two plushies All Might had gifted him are resting.

"Aww, these are so cute!" Hagakure fawns, picking up the green bunny. "I didn't expect you'd have something like this, but I approve!"

"Oh, uh, they were a gift from... someone." It's probably best not to bring attention to Izuku and All Might's relationship, especially when they're already politely turning their heads the other way.

Ashido coos a little while petting the green Pomeranian. "I mean, I get the bunny, it looks exactly like Midoriya—" ("It does *not*," Izuku protests, though no one even dignifies him with an answer) "—but why the puppy?" she wonders.

*

Her question is answered a few days later.

There are toilets in each of their rooms, but the bathing area is shared space so Izuku has resorted to taking his showers either early in the morning or late at night to avoid his classmates.

On this particular occasion he's opted for late in the night, finishing just a few minutes shy from curfew. Izuku has just tied his damp hair in a messy low ponytail and pulled on his clothes when the door to the locker room opens and someone steps inside.

"Oh!" Izuku jumps, and makes sure that his back is covered before turning to greet the person. "Um, hi Shoji. Did you leave something here? ...Shoji?"

But Shoji just kind of stares at Izuku, and the mouth on one end of a tentacle is hanging open. And then, he very slowly lifts another tentacle and snaps a photo of Izuku with his phone.

Snap.

Izuku blinks. "Uh... Shoji...?"

But the boy is now furiously tapping away on his phone. Izuku is about to call him again when he hears the *ping!* of his own phone notifying a text. Izuku glances at Shoji before pulling out his phone and finds that there are several new texts on the *Class 1-A Chat Room For Emergencies.* (It's a mouthful, he knows, but Iida had named it and no one had the heart to try to change it.)

[Shoji: GUYS]

[Shoji: I FOUND OUT WHY HE'S A POMERANIAN]

[Shoji: (image)]

The photo attached is of Izuku frozen with a wide-eyed, deer in headlights look, his hair in that low bushy ponytail.

Izuku is just about to ask what's going on when the chat room *blows up.*

[Ashido: omg]

[Aoyama: Oh☆]

[Kaminari: dude wat]

[Sero: the bunny tail evolves into a pomeranian tail wtf]

[Ashido: omg]

[Kirishima: DUDE]

[Sato: DUDE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!]

[Sero: how does that even work]

[Hagakure: awwww♡]

[Ashido: omg]

[Kouda: !!]

[Jiro: He's not just a bunny, he's a puppy too?!]

[Uraraka: What is this and why did we not have this in our life earlier]

[Ashido: omg]

[Iida: Midoriya! Shoji! It's almost curfew! Please return to your rooms!]

[Iida: And everyone! This is a chat room for emergencies only!]

[Kaminari: wtf do you mean Iida, this IS an emergency!]

[Uraraka: We've unraveled the mysteries of the universe!!]

[Ashido: OMG]

*

(When Izuku meets Shinsou a few days later for their first practice session, the boy greets Izuku with "So. I heard about those bunny and Pomeranian dolls.")

(Izuku sputters, because, just, *how?* Shinsou's not even living in the same building as Class A, what the fuck?)

(But then all other thoughts are blown out of Izuku's mind when Shinsou hands him something.)

("Thought you might as well have this too.")

(Izuku stares down at the object Shinsou has dumped into Izuku's arms. It's a plushie. It's a stuffed animal. It's green. It's a guinea pig.)

(Izuku looks up at the other boy with betrayal written on his face. *"Traitor,"* he accuses.)

(Shinsou looks ridiculously pleased with himself.)

*

The addition to Izuku's collection of fluffy green animal lookalikes aside ("I do *not* look like them! ...Stop laughing!") the students are training to make special moves in preparation for the provisional license exam.

Izuku has been getting ideas from various people from the beginning. He modeled his fighting style after Eraserhead's, mimicked All Might's smashes, took note of (cough—*ripped off*—cough) Bakugo's moves (sorry not sorry, Kacchan), and learned from Gran Torino's erratic movement patterns. And so it's only natural for him to turn to his friends for help.

He remembers how useless he was when he'd been kidnapped with his arms broken. Aizawa was, as always, right. Izuku can't be held back by such weaknesses, and even if he is, he needs more cards up his sleeve to compensate. Izuku had already tried using One For All to strengthen his legs during his fight with Bakugo at the finals of the Sports Festival when his arms were out of commission. With Full Cowl and Iida's help, he's forming a new kick based fighting style to alleviate the strain on his arms.

(He also visited Hatsume Mei at the Development Studio to reform his costume to better suit his new shoot style. And while she had been enthusiastic and helpful, she had also been scarily adamant about

showing Izuku some of her more... *inspired* inventions.)

("What do you think of this baby?! I got the inspiration from the Mido-bunny-tentacle-burrito!" "The... the what?" "You know! When you were wrapped up in those tentacles at the Sports Festival like a scene from an ero manga—" "Stop. Just. Please. Stop.")

And with training the fire side of his quirk with Shinsou and exchanging ideas with Todoroki, Izuku is pretty satisfied with how his training is going.

One evening, Izuku has come down to the common area of the dorms for a glass of water when someone waves him over.

"Oh! Hey, Midoriya!"

Izuku turns to find the girls sitting together on the sofas. Its looks like Hagakure was the one to call him. The invisible girl bounces over to him.

"Can I pet your hair?" she blurts out.

"...Huh?" Izuku blinks at the request.

Hagakure's sleeves move up and down as if she's waving her arms.

"I mean, I always wanted to ask because it looks so soft and fluffy, but it sounds kinda weird, you know? But now that we're living together, I figured now is as good a chance as ever! So, whaddya say?"

Izuku blinks again at her enthusiasm. "Um... I guess?" It's not like touching his hair will harm him. And besides, it can't be any weirder than Todoroki kneading his hand like some giant cat, right?

"Yay!" Hagakure does a little victory dance and then draws Izuku towards the common room. She seats Izuku on the floor in front of one of the sofas and proceeds to pet his hair.

"Oooh... so soft... so fluffy..."

One by one, the other girls join in, cooing and awwing. Someone tugs the bobby pins out of Izuku's bun while multiple fingers comb through his curls, and Izuku has no idea how this happened, but before he knows it the girls have started to really gotten down to business in playing with his hair.

Izuku sits on the floor, blinking owlishly, as Hagakure and Ashido

braid little sections of his hair with bits of colourful ribbons while they chatter together. Asui and Uraraka are decorating the right side of his head with pink flower shaped pins, and he's sure his green hair makes him look like some kind of demented flower bush. Izuku doesn't even want to know what Jiro and Yaoyorozu are doing to the back of his hair. Where did they even get all these ribbons and pins from? Did Yaoyorozu make them with her quirk? (*Traitor.*)

Izuku is sitting there, bewildered, when he spots Ojiro staring at them from where he was passing through the hallway.

"Help," he pleads.

Ojiro just wordlessly lifts up his phone. And then he takes a picture of them.

Snap.

With the way Izuku's phone is blowing up in his pocket, he must have uploaded it on the *Class 1-A Chat Room For Emergencies.*

He stares at Ojiro in betrayed disbelief. *"Traitor.* Traitors *everywhere."*

The boy just grins.

*

It becomes a thing.

Jiro uploads a photo of Kaminari when he short-circuited during training. Sero uploads a photo of Kirishima snoring away inside a bathtub, and in retaliation Kirishima gets a picture of Sero falling from his hammock with a comical expression on his face. Someone uploads the sorry remains of a late night food fight that had broken out when some of the boys snuck out of their rooms for a midnight snack. And then Sato starts putting up photos of whatever snack he's baked whenever he needs taste-testers, and so on and so on.

The *Class 1-A Chat Room For Emergencies* becomes filled with so many funny photos of each other, homemade memes, and food pics that even Iida eventually gives up on trying to stop them and just makes a new group chat named *Class 1-A Chat Room For REAL Emergencies.*

Iida gestures and poses dramatically in despair at the thought that he's failed his duties as the class president. Izuku pats Iida's back in consolation with one hand while he snaps a photo with the other.

And then he uploads it on the group chat.

[Midoriya: (image)]

[Midoriya: we finally broke him! good job, team!]

[Midoriya: (high-five emoji)]

[Ashido: (high-five emoji)]

[Kirishima: (high-five emoji)]

[Sero: (high-five emoji)]

[Kaminari: (high-five emoji)]

...

*

Shouto brings out two mugs and sets them on the table of the shared kitchen space. It's late in the evening, and most of their other classmates are in their rooms.

It isn't long before the person he'd been waiting for shows up.

"Hey," Midoriya smiles at him, and Shouto feels an answering smile tug at his lips, easier and freer with each passing day.

"Hey," he returns. But then he blinks as he realizes that Midoriya didn't come empty-handed. "...What are those?"

Midoriya looks down at the plate he's holding.

"Some kind of... bread...? Mini cake? I think Aoyama said it's called financier?"

Shouto raises his brows, silently questioning. Midoriya gives him a pained look.

“Don’t ask me, I have no idea what’s going on. Aoyama keeps feeding me. Last night, he left me cheese. On my *balcony*. And Kouda keeps giving me carrots that I’m *positive* are actually for his pet rabbit.”

Shouto bites his lower lip to keep in a grin as Midoriya half-heartedly grumbles about their classmates treating him like their resident bunny. (Or Pomeranian. Or guinea pig.) Class A may have agreed not to ask anything, but it’s not like the kidnapping had no effect on them. While the students still look up to Midoriya, now, they’ve also taken to looking *after* Midoriya too.

Midoriya sets the plate of snacks on the table beside the two mugs, and Shouto brings out some milk and honey.

During the summer training camp, Shouto had warmed milk with his quirk and shared it with Midoriya. And now Midoriya is holding him to his promise to teach him how to do it, so they have these sessions a few days a week.

Sometimes they’re joined by Sato, who frequents the kitchen and provides them with extra food to practice heating. Sometimes it’s Yaoyorozu, who gave an impassioned lecture on tea making and gifted them with tea bags.

Today, though, it’s just the two of them. And Shouto can’t help but appreciate it.

Some of their classmates had groaned and made disgusted noises when they found out what they were doing (“We were training all day, and you’re training *more* after school?!”) but Shouto actually finds this time rather relaxing. It’s nice, being able to teach Midoriya about the fire quirk they share. Shouto knows it’s ridiculous, but it makes him feel more... connected. Closer.

And it’s a perfect excuse to be with Midoriya more, so. How could he ever complain?

He shakes off these thoughts as he pours milk into the mugs.

“Remember, don’t overheat it. This won’t explode like the eggs, but it’s best to be safe.”

Midoriya wrinkles his nose at the reminder of some of their more...

exciting failures. He wraps both his hands around one mug and stares down at it with a slight frown marring his brow. (Shouto is seized by the urge to smooth the crease away. But he refrains, if only for the sake of not breaking Midoriya's concentration.)

A faint glow blossoms between them. Small licks of flame jump between Midoriya's fingers, and Shouto is pleased to see that they don't burn Midoriya anymore. Soon enough, the milk is brought to a slight simmer and the mug is steaming.

Midoriya sits back with a relieved sigh. He twitches one finger and the honey comes soaring to him. He dribbles it into the warmed milk and hands the mug to Shouto.

"How's that?"

Shouto takes a sip of the drink. "Not bad. A little more honey next time, please."

Midoriya rolls his eyes, though his lips can't help curving in a smile. "I was talking about my quirk, but sure, I'll keep that in mind."

Shouto hides his own smile behind the mug, though he's sure Midoriya can read it even so. "You're getting faster," he compliments as he hands Midoriya the mug of milk he'd warmed while Midoroya was concentrating on his.

Midoriya groans. "Not as fast as you, evidently." He takes a sip of the offered drink. "A little *less* honey in mine next time, please."

"I'll keep that in mind."

They smile at each other.

+ Omake +

(leaving Midoirya residence)

All Might: Somehow your mother reminds me of Nana...

Izuku: You mean her hairstyle?

All Might:

Chapter End Notes

Much like Aizawa, I'm suffocating in all this fluff. Help.

I've mentioned before that I have a bucket list of sorts for things I've always looked forward to writing in BYW. (for example: Dad Might and Dadzawa, Sports Festival, Stain, "We call them suns", "We're next / You're next", "He was my father", dorm shenanigans, etc...)
Next up on the list is Eri.
Oh, Eri. Oooohhhhhh, Eri. I can't *wait.*
rubs hands in gleeful anticipation
cackles in mad delight
Izuku headbang

The Last Straw

Chapter Notes

So... I've been sitting on this chapter for ages because I had a specific point in mind where I wanted to end this chapter. Except I only just now realized it would take far too long to get there. So here's what I have. Apologies for the wait, and though the chapters are a bit shorter, I promise the next chapter won't take as long!

On happier thoughts: FAN ART!! (sobs with joy)

"Lit" Izuku by egosarecool: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/183148130944/owhitekiwibird-dude-ur-fanfic-is-lit-ha-also-it

Sports Festival Izu by summersnufkin: https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/183512334834/softnarutos-read-burn-your-wings-by

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If you ask Izuku later, he'll blame it on Bakugo.

Actually, he should have started out by blaming him. Izuku doesn't know why he didn't. Blaming Bakugo should be his default setting. Because this is all *totally* Bakugo's fault. Yup.

It happened like this.

It's the last day of training before they leave for the Provisional License Exam, and though Aizawa told them to take things easy, everyone's geared up and putting the finishing touches on their new special moves. Izuku was no exception, and he decided to get Todoroki's help for the new fire based technique he came up with.

"I still need practice stabilizing it. Could you shoot your fire and ice at me to see if I can hold it even in different temperatures?"

"Sure. That would help with my training too," Todoroki agreed easily and started flinging his quirk at Izuku. "I'm kind of surprised this wasn't already a special move. You do it all the time."

“Um,” Izuku weaved around the spikes of ice and columns of fire as he answered. “I’ve actually never done it consciously before this training. And I got the idea to refine it from Kacchan’s—”

“WHAT WAS THAT, YOU RIPP-OFF?!”

The roar came from above them where Bakugo had been blasting at Ectoplasm’s clones, and he seemed to have somehow overheard the tail end of Izuku’s words.

“It’s nothing, Kacchan!”

“Yes it fucking was, you arrogant bastard, copyright is a *thing* dammit, what the fuck have you done this time—?!”

And then it kind of spiralled from there. Bakugo, in his self-righteous fury, jumped down and invited himself into the fray and suddenly there were explosions mixed among the fire and ice. And the thing is, Bakugo is a given, but both Todoroki and Izuku can be pretty competitive and hot headed too. So instead of doing the sensible thing and stopping, it somehow turned into a three-way fight and they ended up all over the gym, blasting their quirks at each other and barrelling into their other classmates in their chaotic grappling.

And Class A being Class A, instead of being mad at them, they were *ecstatic*.

“Oh my god... it’s finally happening...! Bakugo vs. Midoriya vs. Todoroki! The match of our dreams!”

“Three-way firefight!!!”

“Burn baby burrrrrrrnnnnnn!!!”

“Get the battle music going, Jiro!”

“Quick! Someone bust out the popcorn!”

“Sato! Sato! I know you have emergency snacks! This is a Grade A Emergency!”

“Yaomomo, please, make me 3D glasses!”

“3D glasses, are you kidding me? Make me a goddamn *camcorder*—”

Pandemonium ensued as everyone went into hyper-excited passive-aggressive spectator mode and crowded around to watch. Whistles

and boos were equally abundant. Popcorn was thrown.

“That was *dirty,* Bakugo! Do it again!”

“Go, Midoriya! Kill ‘em! Kill ‘em with fire!”

“Lookin’ *cool,* Todoroki!”

It got so out of hand that eventually Midnight and Aizawa had to resort to using their quirks before everyone calmed down again.

Midnight found them hilarious.

Aizawa did not.

And now here they are, shoulders hunched and feet shuffling under Aizawa’s longsuffering gaze.

“I take it this means you’re all confident for the Exam tomorrow?” Aizawa glares, and there’s an undercurrent of *you all had better pass after putting me through this, or else.* Class A shifts guiltily under the hero’s threatening glare.

“And you three!” Izuku cringes as Aizawa turns to him, Todoroki, and Bakugo. “I told you not to overdo it today to reserve your energy for tomorrow. Not only did you disobey, but what you did was dangerous, unsupervised, and you also disturbed the others’ training.”

“It’s not like they’re complaining,” Bakugo grumbles, and Izuku shoves an elbow into his side in a vain attempt to shut him up. Aizawa narrows his eyes.

“No more training for you three until the Exam tomorrow. And yes, that includes whatever you do in the kitchen, Midoriya and Todoroki.”

Izuku deflates at that. Even Todoroki, who had been standing there impassively, jolts a little and looks like he’s going to protest against the ban. Izuku tugs Todoroki’s sleeve and minutely shakes his head, and Todoroki settles with a disgruntled but resigned air. Aizawa looks over them one more time before dismissing them.

Izuku buries his face in his hands with a moan.

“*Kacchan.*”

“What?”

“I got scolded. By *Eraserhead.* I’m *never* going to get over this. Oh my god, Kacchan. I’m blaming this on you.”

Todoroki, who now knows Izuku’s idolization of their homeroom teacher, pats his back. Bakugo has also been told that Aizawa was the one who saved Izuku and Inko, but he has no sympathy and just rolls his eyes with a scoff.

“I can’t believe no training actually counts as a *punishment* for you guys,” Kaminari groans at the end of class as he flops onto the floor, and several others agree and nod. But it’s someone else who responds.

“Oh? What’s this I hear? Did Class A get scolded and punished? That’s strange! And here I thought you were supposed to be so much better than us! Ahahahahaha!”

Izuku lifts his face from his hands at the now familiar maniac laughter of Monoma. It looks like Class B has come to use the gym, and as usual, the boy wastes no time in taking a jab at Class A. Kendo sighs and makes an apologetic gesture on Monoma’s behalf, and Class A, who’ve learned to more or less ignore the boy, just wave her off and prepare to leave the gym. Monoma doesn’t even seem to notice that practically no one’s paying attention to him and keeps laughing maniacally until he spots Izuku.

“And if it’s none other than *the person who ended All Might!*”

That makes Izuku *freeze.*

Normally, whatever anyone says to Izuku tends to just bounce off him. Izuku can be visciously protective of his friends, but insults directed at himself rarely make any impact. Izuku has grown up to violence and cruelty, so schoolyard bullying just pales in comparison.

But what Monoma said...

That hits hard.

The person who ended All Might.

The media had exploded in the wake of Kamino, and while Izuku hadn’t been targeted nearly as much as All Might himself, he’d still been thrown under the spotlight. There had been speculations about the relationship between the two, of course, but the press talked about Izuku even separately from his ties to the hero.

One of the things they latched onto was how Izuku's kidnapping was the catalyst for the Kamino raid, and thus All Might's retirement. Despite their other wild ravings and speculations, this is one thing that is so painfully true that Izuku can't help but cringe.

He ended All Might.

He knew that. He knows that. But reading strangers talk about it online has a completely different impact from hearing it said to his face by someone he knows.

Monoma probably doesn't even know what a sore spot he hit. But it still hits *hard.*

Izuku swallows thickly and forces himself to keep walking until he sees All Might on the way out of the gym. Despite his injuries, the hero had been coming in from time to time to give the students advice on their training. But he and Izuku had kept their interaction to a minimum, what with the speculations going around. There may only be UA staff and students around, but it's best to be cautious when both of their safety is on the line.

So as Izuku passes by, All Might only gives him a quick secretive smile.

Izuku plasters an answering smile on his face and brushes past.

*

The day of the Provisional License Exam arrives.

It's the first time Izuku has really been in public since Kamino. He expected the stares and the whispers, but having expected it doesn't mean he isn't seized by the impulse to hide behind Shoji again. But his friends are already a step ahead of him and Class A casually groups around him, forming a protective barrier between Izuku and any potential overly zealous questioners.

(Though Shoji does grin down at Izuku and pokes good fun at him again. "We can always do another victory lap—" "Shoji, no." "Come on, I won't let you dow—" "Shoji. *No.*")

They do have a run in with some students from Shiketsu and Ketsubutsu, but soon enough they're all herded into a large room that *opens up* to reveal the stage for the first part of the exam.

"Everyone! Let's stay together as a group!" Izuku calls out to Class A.

Each contester has three targets on their body and is given six balls. If all three targets are hit, you're out, and you need to retire two people to pass. It's entirely possible to poach the third target from someone else, too.

The rules make it obvious that people who know each other will work together as a team, and UA is the prime target since their quirks were shown at the Sports Festival. It's only logical that they stick together.

But.

"Fuck off. What do you think this is, a picnic?"

And with that Bakugo gives the rhetorical middle finger to Izuku's plan and runs off on his own.

Izuku groans and facepalms. "That's it. I'm blaming Kacchan. *Every* time. For *everything.*"

Kirishima flashes Izuku a toothy grin and a thumbs up before he and Kaminari run after Bakugo, though, so at least he's not completely on his own. Izuku looks around to find that everyone else, at least, is sticking to the plan.

Even Todoroki.

"I kinda expected you to go off too," he comments as Todoroki keeps pace, staying close to Izuku's side. "Not that I don't appreciate it, but your quirk works better in open spaces, after all."

Todoroki gives him a flat look.

"I'm done with you running into trouble without me. I'm not taking any chances."

Izuku makes a face at that, but doesn't argue.

But soon they're not even given a choice as Shindo from Ketsubutsu makes a giant earthquake and separates them all from each other.

"Deku!" Uraraka calls, and Izuku instinctively *pulls* her to him.

Uraraka touches him as soon as they're close enough, and with zero gravity and Izuku using his fire as thrusters, they're able to land safely. Izuku coughs a little as the dust settles and looks around. It seems that only he and Uraraka have dropped to this part of the arena. He can only pull one thing at a time, so he hadn't been able to grab anyone else aside from Uraraka, separating them from everyone else.

Izuku grimaces. Todoroki is going to have a *fit*.

"Are you okay?" he asks Uraraka instead. The girl nods, looking around uneasily.

"The others..."

Izuku nods. "We'd better try to find them as soon as possible. The fewer our numbers, the easier it will be for the other schools to pick us off."

They're about to take off when a familiar voice whisper-shouts to them.

"Psst! Midoriya! Uraraka!"

"Sero!"

"Shh!"

The boy emerges from behind a pile of debris and joins them.

"I saw a bunch of kids from other schools headed this way!" he informs them in a hushed voice when he draws close enough. "We could probably avoid them, or ambush them if we stay quiet. Whaddya say?"

Izuku considers it. On one hand, it's not a good idea to be ganged up on and they really should find their other classmates. But on the other, they eventually need to engage if they want to pass.

"How many were there?"

"Uh, I think a bit less than ten? Maybe?"

So somewhere around eight people. Three against eight is nowhere near good odds, but they do need six victims—two for each of them—if they want to pass.

He looks around at Uraraka and Sero, and find them patiently and faithfully waiting for his decision. Their unspoken trust hardens Izuku's resolve.

Avoid or confront. Find the others, or pass the exam.

...Why not do both?

"I have a plan."

*

Izuku has never been to an amusement park, but he does have a few generic notions about it. Thrilling rides, junk food, balloons. Fun in general.

The Exam doesn't have any roller coasters or food stalls, but Izuku, Uraraka, and Sero have managed to get themselves some balloons.

Living, breathing, squirming, screaming, terrified, human balloons.

And it's a *lot* of fun.

Uraraka skips merrily on her way, both her hands holding a bundle of Sero's tapes, each one attached to a contester that's floating high, high in the air. The people are either yelling at them in outrage or screaming in terror every time a strong wind buffets them, but the distance and the tape over their mouths make it so that their voices barely even carry to ground level.

Izuku has never been to an amusement park, but the mad, mad grin on Uraraka's face makes him wonder if this is what it would look like. If it was a demented, horror-themed amusement park, that is.

He shares his sentiments with the others, and Sero doubles over laughing while Uraraka gasps and declares "You've *never* been to one?! Then we're going to have to go together sometime!"

With that promise made, they continue on their way, cheerily waving their captive human balloons in the air.

A few minutes ago, Izuku had acted as bait and lured the other students into position. While everyone's already seen Izuku's quirk

from the Sports Festival, they'd been expecting the bone shattering force of One For All 100% and so were caught off guard by Full Cowl's speed and prescision. With that upper hand Izuku had startled them and then surrounded the area with a fence of fire, occasionally pulling back some people who had quirks that could get them away. And while they were distracted, Uraraka and Sero had thrown a net over them and captured them all.

The three of them could have passed the exam if they had pressed their balls against the targets then and there. But they couldn't just simply pass.

Plus Ultra, after all.

So Sero had tied each of their captives with his tape, Uraraka stole their gravity so that they'd float, and Izuku used the heat of his fire to create air currents. This resulted in their captives floating high in the air, far enough away from the ground that others coming to help or poach them would have a hard time reaching them unless they had telekinesis or flight quirks.

These human balloons serve double purposes.

The first is bait. They're high enough to be seen from a reasonably far off distance, and anyone who sees this bizarre sight is bound to be curious (or flabbergasted) enough to come to investigate. If they're people from Class A, they can regroup. If they're people from other schools, well. More balloons.

The second is a sort of storage. You need to retire two people to pass, but while they have more than enough victims to go around, the three of them don't plan on passing just yet. Only the first one hundred people will be passed, but the announcements let them know that there's still some considerable leeway. In that time, they've decided to look for their classmates and give help if needed. And Izuku can always pull down their victims and pass when they want to, like some kind of human vending machine.

So here they are, with Uraraka bouncing merrily with a skip in her step, her sweet innocent face stretched in a gleeful grin as she waves around handfuls of human balloons as if enjoying the terrified screams of her victims high above, and Sero and Izuku following behind her.

"...What the hell."

They turn at the flat voice to find Jiro, who seems to be the one who

spoke, with Tokoyami and Asui. All three of them stare for a long moment.

Tokoyami eventually covers his eyes with a hand. “I should have expected this was done by one of us.”

“It certainly is our brand of crazy,” Jiro agrees.

“Mmn, I wish I had my phone, ribbit,” Asui says as she puts a finger to her mouth with laughing eyes, and Sero nods vigorously. Izuku knows some of their classmates are waging a war on who can upload the “best” photo on the class chat room, and Uraraka with her demented amusement park balloons certainly would have been a top contender. It’s too bad they’re not allowed to have their phones during the exam.

“Have you met anyone else?” Izuku asks. Tokoyami shakes his head.

“Not anyone from our class, no.”

And so they continue on like that. With the addition of Asui, Jiro, and Tokoyami, it’s even easier to take down any hostiles that come after them and add to the balloons. They meet Hagakure, who had already used her invisibility to her advantage to easily take down an opponent, and decide they’ve done what they can and should pass the exam when the announcer calls out that eighty people have passed.

Izuku uses his quirk to pull down their human balloons one by one, and by now most of them seem to be so thoroughly exhausted from screaming profanities (or just plain screaming, it was kinda hard to tell) that there’s little to no resistance. One person in particular seems to have struggled so much that the tape over their mouth has come off. But instead of shouting at them, he just flops belly-up and gives them a haggard look.

“Just end me now,” he pleads hoarsely, and seems almost *glad* when Izuku presses his balls to his targets and lets him down. He collapses in a heap and hugs the earth where he lies as if he never wants to leave the ground again.

Once they’ve all passed using their human vending machine, they’re led to a separate area where they find some of their classmates have already passed. Izuku brightens when he finds Todoroki.

“Todoroki!”

The boy turns to him, similarly lighting up at Izuku’s familiar voice,

though Izuku doubts most people would notice the difference.

“Midoriya.”

Izuku grins as the other boy come towards them.

“See? I was fine even without you,” he boasts jokingly.

Todoroki purses his lips skeptically, but Izuku can tell from the way his eyes are dancing with laughter that it’s mostly for show.

“This time,” he allows, and Izuku rolls his eyes, admittedly more fond than actually exasperated.

But then he stiffens. He casts his gaze around, but doesn’t find anything out of the ordinary.

“Midoriya?” Todoroki questions, and Izuku frowns a little.

“...Someone’s been watching me. Not just now, but throughout the first part of the Exam too.”

Which says something about their skill. Even with the utter chaos going on, Izuku had still felt someone’s persistent gaze following him every now and then. But he never found the person, like he can’t now, which only makes him even more uneasy.

“A curious fan?” Todoroki guesses, and Izuku shrugs helplessly.

Todoroki gives him a look that’s almost smug.

“Catnip.”

“Am *not.*”

*

The next part of the exam is a rescue simulation. Someone on the planning committee evidently shares UA’s fondness for extravagance and dramatics because they go full Plus Ultra and *blow up* the entire arena. Professional members of the ‘Help Us Company’, or ‘HUC’ for short, are masquerading as injured and trapped victims from the “terror attack” and it’s their job to rescue them.

Unlike the previous part of the test, instead of competing against each other, this time the students are going to have to work together, regardless of what school they're from. It's best if they all split up to the place where they're most useful, Midoriya explains, and everyone nods at his reasoning and does as he suggests.

"You too," Midoriya says as he looks straight at Shouto. "We don't need two fire users in the same place. It'd be better to spread out."

Shouto hesitates. Logically, he knows that Midoriya is right. But he can't help the part of him that insists that Midoriya is villain catnip, that stubbornly wants to stay close no matter how strong or capable the other boy is. He's torn between his sense of logic and—what? Emotions? Instincts? Need?—something that wants to hold onto Midoriya *tight* and never let go, never even let him out of sight.

Midoriya gives him a smile, as if he knows how conflicted Shouto is (and how does he always do that?) and gently pokes Shouto's side.

"Hey, I was fine without you during the first half," he points out with a huff.

But just like Midoriya knows Shouto, Shouto knows Midoriya. He may roll his eyes and complain about the names Shouto calls him like villain catnip or lightning rod for trouble, but he's never truly averse to it. Midoriya doesn't bother to hide the quirk of his lips and the light in his eyes that's so unbearably *fond*.

"I don't want your chances at passing to be diminished just because you're worried about me," Midoriya admits quietly, and while Shouto would argue against the "just" part, he understands the sentiment and appreciates how Midoriya is looking out for him too.

He finally relents.

"Alright," he murmurs, and he can't quite stop himself from reaching out and brushing his fingers against Midoriya's as he passes by. "Stay safe."

Midoriya just smiles back. "You too."

And with that, they split up.

It isn't long before Shouto runs into Yoarashi Inasa from Shiketsu. Just like all the other times they've met today, the boy's bright and enthusiastic expression turns sour as soon as he spots Shouto.

“Endeavor’s son,” he spits out.

Shouto’s brows crease in reflex at that label.

“What’s your problem?” he asks. “Did I do something?”

If Yoarashi was at the test for the recommendation to UA, they would have met, but Shouto doesn’t remember him. To be fair, he hadn’t remembered Yaoyorozu either for a while, since he’d been too focused on showing he won’t use his fire to Endeavor to have the attention to spare for any of the students. It’s nothing personal against them. But Yoarashi evidently has something against Shouto.

Yoarashi Inasa looks positively enraged at Shouto’s question.

“You don’t even remember,” he grits out. “As I thought. You look like you’ve changed a bit, but you’re still the same as Endeavor. Your eyes have the same cold fury as him.”

Shouto’s frown deepens and he grits his teeth at being compared to his father. But he forces himself to think of Midoriya and all the conversations they’ve had—*we are not our fathers*—and turns away from the other boy. He trusts Midoriya’s words more that Yoarashi’s.

“I don’t know what your problem is, but save it until the exam is over,” he tries to be level.

But that only fans Yoarashi’s ire.

“Of course that’s what you’re concerned about. Results are the only thing you and Endeavor are interested in, right?” He sneers. “You know what they say. Like father, like son.”

And that makes Shouto’s thoughts *freeze* and his insides *burn.* Because he’d never liked that saying in the first place, what with his hate for Endeavor. But now that he knows about Midoriya’s father, that saying is as much an insult to *Midoriya* as it is to Shouto.

And Shouto can’t *stand* that.

He turns around slowly, facing the other boy. His voice comes out in a flat snarl.

“What. Did you say.”

Yoarashi flinches when he meets Shouto’s eyes, and then he lets out a sneer. Because those mismatched eyes *burn* with that same cold fury

he'd just mentioned. The same as Endeavor.

*

"It's okay," Izuku says softly. "I am here."

"What are you doing, ripping off All Might?! Show some originality!" the HUC member barks at him, and Izuku blinks at the complaint. He'd been using those words ever since he'd stood between Inko and Hisashi, after all, and while it probably *had* started as a tribute to the hero, he'd been using it so regularly that he's thrown when its origins are pointed out.

Class 1-A of UA hasn't had nearly as much rescue training as combat training, for obvious reasons—with the League of Villains targeting them, *they* were the ones that needed rescue, so it only made sense for the school to focus on making sure their students could stay alive first and foremost—but Izuku still has plenty of experience with damage control. Hisashi had often left Inko so beaten and battered that she could barely move, and it was always Izuku who had frantically tried to patch up her injuries. And later, Inko had been too frightened that she might hurt Izuku more if she touched him, so he had tended to his own injuries too.

And unlike that sausage stunt by Gran Torino, this time Izuku knows that this is a fake scenario so he's able to keep his cool.

For the most part.

Because these ruins look too much like the aftermath of the Kamino raid for comfort.

There had been victims that night too. Innocent civilians and bystanders that got caught in All For One's devastating range, too injured or trapped to get out.

Izuku couldn't help them. And it wasn't because he didn't have a hero license. It was because he was *weak*. All he could do was try not to be a burden, and he couldn't even manage that. All Might couldn't fight properly because he was within range, and Izuku ended up having to be rescued yet again, putting his friends in danger too.

His hands curl into fists.

This isn't a real situation. These aren't really injured people. But it's still similar enough to the nightmare of Kamino that it makes Izuku swallow thickly, and he vows it'll be different this time. It'll be different from now on.

He lights up with Full Cowl and *runs*.

Izuku works with people from other schools, deferring to other older students' judgments from time to time to make the most of his abilities and carry out rescue operations with other people.

"Over here!" calls a familiar voice, and Izuku looks over to see... Uraraka?

"I can't reach him," the girl points to a child that's stranded on top of some wreckage. "Help?"

"Of course," Izuku nods as he lights up with Full Cowl and brings down the HUC member. The girl rushes towards them once he gets down, crowding close as she checks the boy's fake injuries. "You know, you don't have to pretend to be Uraraka. I would have helped anyways."

The girl freezes. And then, she slowly lifts her head to give Izuku a blank stare.

"...You knew?"

"Uraraka can now float herself for short periods of time without much penalty. She wouldn't need my help. And..." Izuku frowns slightly. "...It's you, isn't it? You're the one who's been watching me."

The girl blinks slowly, and then her appearance melts to reveal the girl from Shiketsu.

She grins.

"You noticed? I'm so *happy!*" she exclaims, putting her hands to her cheeks. "Say, won't you tell me more about you? I'm Camie!"

"...No," Izuku says slowly, tightening his hold on the confused HUC boy. If this person's quirk lets them turn into someone else's appearance, what's to say this is their real face? "You're... familiar. As if..."

The girl's cheeks redden and her eyes curve in delight.

Izuku's eyes widen in realization.

And then, he bursts into flames.

*

Aizawa shoots up from his seat.

"...Stop the Exam."

The hero Joke looks at him in confusion from her seat beside him. "What are you talking about, Eraser?"

But Aizawa doesn't even hear her. He rushes towards one of the proctors in the stands and grabs their shoulder none too gently.

"Stop the Exam!"

The proctor seems startled. "Wha... Eraserhead? What do you—?"

"That right there," Aizawa snarls as he points to the beacon of fire blazing away in the arena, "is a warning, a distress signal. We have to stop the Exam."

Aizawa's doing his best to keep calm, but the man only shakes his head maddeningly despite Aizawa's efforts.

"It's a rescue simulation, of course he's sending up a beacon. I'm sure it's just part of the exam—"

"I know my student!" Aizawa roars, losing his patience. Midoriya may be a problem child, but Aizawa knows his kid well enough to be sure that he'd never use that flare—the one he used on *the night he was kidnapped*—for anything short of a real emergency. That means Midoriya is in trouble, that he needs help, that Aizawa *needs to be there for him.*

"Stop the exam," he hisses for the third time, and there's something like alarm in the proctor's eyes now. "Because I'm going in whether you do so or not."

*

"*Midoriya.*"

The name escapes Shouto's mouth like a breathless gasp, like a desperate prayer. The moment he sees those familiar flames clawing their way up to the sky, everything else gets abruptly and violently shoved out of his mind. His anger against Yoarashi, fighting against Gang Orca who's posing as the "villain", the entire Exam in general—all of that falls away.

There's only one thing important to him right now.

Midoriya.

Shouto *has* to help Midoriya. He has to. He can't lose him again.

Not again.

"Yoarashi," Shouto grasps the other boy's shoulder desperately. No matter what the boy may have said, it's still true that he's powerful. And Shouto can put aside any insult if it means getting Midoriya more help. "My friend is in danger. Please, lend me your strength."

The other boy knocks away Shouto's hand. "What are you up to? Why would I—"

But the boy falters when he looks properly at Shouto. Shouto has no idea what Yoarashi sees in his expression—alarm, worry, desperation, protectiveness, fear?—but his acidic look falls away. He looks almost lost, as if he's truely seeing Shouto for the first time. Shouto doesn't care what it is, as long as it gets Yoarashi to help.

"*Please,*" he repeats.

For Midoriya, he's not above begging.

*

“Oh no, no, no, not again,” someone from Class A breathes when they see the pillar of fire blaze up into the sky.

Including the USJ, this is the third time that beacon has flared, and it never fails to make their heart *clench* in their chest.

When the students of Class 1-A look around, they see their understanding and fear reflected on the faces of each other. Because they *know* that that flare means something bad happened to Midoriya. There’s a heartstopping moment of alarm and fear before their faces harden in resolve. They nod to each other.

“Everyone! Forget about the Exam and get to safety!” Iida shouts.

“This is a real situation!” Hagakure adds.

But the people from the other schools don’t follow their instant understanding.

“What…?”

“What do you mean?”

“Huh? What’s going on?”

“Is… is this a trick?”

“Wait, I know! You’re just trying to sabotage us!”

The crowd murmurs at the last accusation. Class 1-A bite back their frustration. But then—

[Uh… this is an announcement. There has been a villain attack. No, I don’t mean Gang Orca— this is a real situation. Everyone help the HUC members and get to safety until the pros arrive! I repeat, this is a real situation—]

The announcement rings over the speakers, leaving people in shock.

“Wait, really…?”

“Is… is this part of the test?”

“Villain attack?! Here?!”

Fear starts to set in as the students are faced with their first real situation. Everyone panics.

Everyone, except Class 1-A.

“We have to move. *Now,*” Asui stresses.

“Go!” Uraraka shouts.

They go.

*

Aizawa hadn’t even waited for the proctors to make the announcement before he vaulted over the fence and rushed to Midoriya. When he makes it to the site, he finds his problem child holding a crying child in his arms. It’s one of the HUC members, but there’s fresh blood gushing from a real wound and he’s crying in earnest. Midoriya is holding him in a comforting but also protective embrace.

His eyes snap up at Aizawa’s approach, and for the first time, there’s a wariness in his eyes when he looks at Aizawa.

Aizawa freezes. For all the time he’s known Midoriya, he’s never looked at Aizawa with anything less than pure adoration and respect. And while that had made him uncomfortable, he hadn’t been prepared for how much it would *hurt* when Midoriya doesn’t look at him with affection clear in his eyes.

“...Midoriya?”

For some reason, the kid relaxes instantly at Aizawa’s uncertain call.

“*Sensei,*” he breathes in relief.

“It was Toga Himiko,” he says in a rush. “She took the appearance of Uraraka and the girl from Shiketsu. When I realized who she was, she took this kid as a hostage to try to escape. I managed to get him back, but I lost her, and she changed appearance again and ran away. Uraraka mentioned that Toga sucked out her blood during the summer camp, so I think that’s her quirk. She can transform into someone if she has their blood.”

The words tumble out of Midoriya in a rush.

Midoriya's hand is steady as it keeps rubbing soothing circles on the crying child's back, but Aizawa can hear the tremor in his voice.

"Sensei. When I was kidnapped."

When Midoriya meets Aizawa's gaze again his eyes are bright and wild with something bordering on horror.

He swallows thickly.

"*They took my blood.*"

Chapter End Notes

I've noticed a lot of people leaving comments along the lines of 'sorry this is so long' 'sorry for rambling' 'I'll stop now' and such... but darlings, please. The greatest reason I write and post is your comments. I don't mean to preassure anyone, but long comments give me life. So please don't shorten your comments on the mistaken notion that I don't like them. Rant at me! Yell at me! Ramble at me! You're more than welcome!!!

Anyways, that said, hope to come with the next chapter soon! *Izuku Headbang*

When Like Meets Like - Part Two

Chapter Notes

Who was it that promised a quick update? (sweat drop) (guilty shifting)
This was a particularly difficult chapter, partly because both Word and Grammarly kept auto-correcting *Mirio* to *Mario*.
If you find any wayward *Mario*s, please let me know. ;ω;

I don't keep up with the anime so I don't know where it's at, but (in case it wasn't obvious) we're going into the Internship / Overhaul / Eri arc now. So uh.. be warned of spoilers if you're not there yet. And go read the manga.
Also, BYW skips over a lot of minor (or not so minor) plot points if it's not directly related to what's happening in BYW, so, again, I highly recommend reading the manga if you're not caught up with at least this arc.

Demented amusement park human balloons by dorkygirl72:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/184742477409/a-quick-doodle-of-a-funny-scene-from-one-of-my-fav
A GIF(t) of Izuku bursting into fire in ch.10 & 9 (p.s. I adore the tags) (*Izuku Headbang*) by azonicCorvidae:
https://archiveofourown.org/works/19706986/chapters/46638355
And this isn't art, but a neat reference by imfantasticbelieveme:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/186116176574

These weren't tagged so I missed these beauties last time ;ω;
Aesthetic for BYW by imfantasticbelieveme:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/184726866299/life-isnt-fair-and-it-definitely-isnt
Comic strip of The Reveal phone call by luxanix:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/184726855129/a-little-comic-i-made-from-a-fic-i-read-its

If you've made art, please give me a poke (leave a link in the comments, tag me if you're on Tumblr, etc..) so I can properly gush over your work and link them here! It deserves to be Izuku Headbanged at by the Izuku Headbang Gang.
Thank you for your lovely work!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

While the first years of UA were taking the provisional licence exam, Toshinori was also busy.

He went to the prison dubbed “Tartarus” to meet All For One.

They talked. If ‘disjointed exchanging of words’ counts as talking. Toshinori hadn’t expected the mastermind to be gullible, but so far he hasn’t been able to get any substantial information on where Shigaraki would have gone or what his goals are.

<All Might, you have three minutes left,> rings a voice from the speakers. That finally gets a reaction out of All For One.

“Wait, wait! That’s all?” All For One protests, desperate to milk this rare opportunity of human contact as much as he can. Even super villain overlords aren’t immune to boredom, after all.

“I still have much to say... Ah. Then would this topic interest you? You recall we healed Midoriya’s arms when he was in our care. He was too severely injured for the doctor to heal him on his own, so I had to help with some of my quirks.”

All For One pauses here, as if gauging Toshinori’s reaction. Evidently, he seems pleased by the way Toshinori instinctively stilled at the mention of his boy.

The villain’s scarred face splits into a wide grin.

“Did you really think healing him was all I did when he was drugged unconscious and under my mercy?”

BAM!!!

<All Might!! Please calm down and back away!> The prison guards fret over the speakers, but.

Calm down? How can he?!

All For One has the gall to *laugh* at the way Toshinori has burst from his chair and slammed his hand against the thick glass pane between them.

“Ah, yes! That’s *exactly* the expression I wanted to see from you! Rest assured, though. I truly only healed him. He’s Tomura’s share, after all, not mine.”

And Toshinori can't— *damn* him. Toshinori doesn't even know what to think. On one hand, it would be exactly like All For One to have said this just to rile him up. But on the other hand, All For One is cunning and cruel enough to mention this as a fake possibility while he actually *did* do something to Midoriya when the boy was unconscious. Aizawa made sure to take young Midoriya to the hospital as soon as he was rescued, of course, but what if All For One did something to the boy that can't be detected by normal means? What if it has a delayed effect? What if he *hurt* his boy?

And what's worse is the fact that All For One undoubtedly knows how panicked Toshinori has become by the few words he uttered. Knows, and is *enjoying* it.

Bastard.

Toshinori grits his teeth and clenches his fists.

Midoriya.

My boy.

*

Midoriya himself may deny it with adamant fervour, but Aizawa is coming to sympathize more and more with Todoroki's claim. Catnip, magnet, lightning rod; Midoriya is all of that and more. And it's not like Midoriya asked for villains to stalk him or anything, but *damn it,* his problem child's going to give Aizawa premature gray hairs.

Midoriya is kneeling on the ground with the crying and bleeding HUC child in his arms. Aizawa approaches them cautiously while he unwraps the ends of his capture weapon and readies it in his hands.

"Are you hurt?"

"I think I sprained my ankle," Midoriya admits. "Could you help me up?"

The child is pushed away as Midoriya reaches out for Aizawa. Aizawa leans down to grasp Midoriya's arm and help him up.

But the moment he's close enough, Midoriya's eyes glint with a

strange light.

The hand that had been innocently reaching out for Aizawa suddenly has a knife in it and strikes like a viper for his jugular, too sudden and too fast to react to out of the blue.

Except.

Aizawa isn't caught off guard.

He'd been waiting.

As soon as killing intent laces the air he flings out the strands of his capture weapon that he'd prepared beforehand, forcing his attacker to spring back. They do so with an extravagant flip, further cementing Aizawa's suspicion.

Midoriya is certainly agile, but he doesn't have that kind of fluid flexibility.

This 'Midoriya' lands on an outcrop facing Aizawa and cocks their head. They make a strange expression that looks completely foreign on Midoriya's face.

"How did you know?" they ask.

Aizawa didn't. Not for certain, anyway.

But the thing is, the moment this 'Midoriya' saw him, he'd called Aizawa "Sensei" when he usually slips and says "Eraserhead" in this kind of situation. And the way he looked at Aizawa held none of the affection and respect Aizawa had become used to.

That alone isn't enough to instantly be sure this isn't the real Midoriya, of course. His problem child *has* been trying to be better about referring to him as a teacher rather than a hero. But with the revelation that there's a shapeshifter around, it *is* enough to be suspicious. So Aizawa had been on his guard.

The HUC child's tearful eyes are wide. Aizawa puts a hand on his shoulder and guides the kid behind him, putting himself between the child and whoever it is that's still disguised as Midoriya. They themselves gave Aizawa the information, so he can't be sure if it's actually Toga Himiko or if that too was a trick.

He's just about to rush forward and try to capture the villain when a

familiar voice calls out to him once more.

"*Eraserhead!*"

Aizawa pauses in his assault because there's alarm and horror in that voice. He turns to find yet another Midoriya who has the HUC child piggybacked on his back.

Wait.

If that's the real Midoriya and the kid from HUC, then who's the kid that's at Aizawa's back?

He whips his head around and catches the 'HUC child's' face split in an eerie grin that's uncannily similar to the one the fake 'Midoriya' has on his face.

There's a knife in his hand.

It flashes towards Aizawa's unprotected back.

*

— Five minutes ago —

Izuku gulps as he faces Utsushimi Camie— no, Toga Himiko.

His flare had forced her to put distance between them, though the HUC child had been protected from the heat and flames in Izuku's embrace.

The girl grins, and then her guise melts away to reveal her true appearance.

Except, she's stark naked.

Despite the situation, Izuku instinctively slaps his palm over the kid's eyes. The kid lets out a squawk—in surprise or protest, he's not sure—and Toga crouches into herself with a giggle.

Izuku can't share her mirth, though. His mind is in overdrive,

analyzing and speculating. Quirk analysis is his specialty, after all, and what Toga's ability implies is absolutely hair-raising.

"You're Toga Himiko. Then Uraraka and the girl from Shiketsu... Uraraka mentioned that you sucked out her blood during the summer camp. That's your quirk, isn't it? You can transform into someone if you have their blood."

And then the realization hits him. Izuku feels his eyes widen in horror.

"When I was kidnapped."

He looks at Toga Himiko with creeping dread.

"*You took my blood.*"

Toga *grins.*

Despite having been found out, Toga doesn't look upset at all. If anything, she's starry-eyed and flushed.

"You figured out all of that just now?" she gushes. "I'm so happy that you're thinking of me so much! Say, tell me about yourself too, hm? Tomura and Dabi hogged you to themselves when you were with us and didn't let me *play* with you."

The girl pouts as she wraps one arm around her knees and fingers a knife with the other hand. (And just where does she keep pulling these knives out of when she's stark naked?) But soon her face breaks into an unhinged grin.

"So I'm *so happy* to meet you again."

And in a blink of an eye, Toga is suddenly *gone.* Izuku starts. He casts his eyes around wildly as he searches for her, tightening his grasp around the HUC kid's shoulders.

But despite all of his situational awareness and caution, Izuku is too late to sense her before Toga seems to almost materialize behind him and breathes in his ear: "I want to know more about you."

Izuku whirls around just in time to glimpse the knife stabbing towards him. He *pulls* the kid out of the way as he himself pivots away from the blade.

"How did you do that?!" he asks.

He's stalling for time (hopefully someone recognized what his signal flare meant and not just brushed it off as part of the Exam) while also fishing for information. Toga is a talkative type, plus she has some weird fixation on him, so Izuku hopes she'll oblige.

He's not disappointed.

"You want to know more about me too!" Toga gushes as her cheeks flush and her eyes light up with an unholy glint. "I divert my opponent's sight and hearing away from my presence. Then I stop breathing, stop *thinking,* and hide. The 'stop thinking' is the hardest part!"

Some sort of technique, then? It can't be a vanishing quirk, since her quirk is changing her appearance to the person she has the blood of.

It would explain how even though Izuku had felt her watching him throughout the Exam, he was never able to find her. This is another level of stealth.

"Why are you here?" Izuku asks before she can vanish from plain sight again. At the same time, he *pulls* her towards him while shooting out a stream of fire around her, trying to capture her.

But even as she's being pulled to him, Toga throws something in Izuku's face. Izuku instinctively knocks it away, only to recognize it too late. It looks just like the marble Mr. Compress uses for his quirk. The one that Izuku himself had been trapped in when he'd been kidnapped.

Then does that mean—?!

A second Toga Himiko bursts out of the marble, and she comes out swinging a knife. Izuku is taken by surprise and reacts just a split second too late.

But instead of stabbing him, the blade lashes out and makes a long cut on the cheek of the HUC kid who's still in Izuku's arms.

The kid yelps in surprise, pain, and fear. Izuku pulls him back, stepping between him and Toga—

—but she's already gone.

Izuku turns his head around this way and that, thinking she's going to pounce on them again, but Toga Himiko—either of them—doesn't

reappear. What's more, he can't even feel her presence anymore.

He doesn't know if she made an escape, or if she's just done toying with him and has gone off to find a new victim. With a clone of herself, there's no telling what she can do. One was bad enough, but *two* Toga Himiko's?

Izuku suppresses a shudder and tends to the kid in his arms first.

"Hey," he calls softly, kneeling down to match his eyes with the child. "It's alright. Are you badly hurt, uh...?"

Izuku doesn't know this HUC kid's name, but he's been keeping admirably still, not screaming or trying to run off in blind panic. But there are tears in his eyes and desperation in the way his hand fists in Izuku's hero suit and won't let go.

"I'm Ha, Hayato," he stutters out, fat tears leaking out even as he bites his trembling lower lip.

Izuku gives him a soft smile.

"Hayato. You were very brave," he praises gently, and the kid looks up at him with wide eyes. The fear in them slowly recedes at Izuku's warm tone. "Thank you for keeping so calm. Are you hurt anywhere other than your cheek?"

The boy shakes his head. The cut is long but shallow, so Izuku isn't too worried about it. What he *is* worried about is the fact that Toga now has a bit of *Hayato's* blood too. Only now does he realize that all this time, Toga hadn't been aiming at him when she swung her knife. She'd been trying to get Hayato and his blood.

Why?

If Toga isn't here for more of Izuku's blood, then does that mean the amount of blood they took while he was kidnapped is enough for whatever they have planned? But then why take Hayato's blood, and just a few drops at that? What is Toga planning? Why is she here?

Izuku consciously keeps his mouth from pressing into a grim line. (He doesn't want to worry Hayato, after all.) He can theorise later. Right now, he has to get Hayato to safety.

"Do you think you can get on my back? It'll be the fastest way to get you to safety," Izuku offers, and Hayato nods again and clambers onto

Izuku's back. Izuku doesn't know if it's just the way he is or if it's thanks to the HUC training, but even though he's trembling, Hayato is taking all this remarkably well.

It's both admirable and incredibly sad at the same time.

"Hold on," is all Izuku says as he lights up with Full Cowl and runs.

But before they can make it to the safe zone, Izuku spots something and stops.

It's Eraserhead. Aizawa. A wave of relief and gratitude washes over Izuku as he realizes that the teacher must have recognized Izuku's flare for the distress call it was and not brushed it off. The Exam grounds are massive, after all, and even if Aizawa could go around through the stands and avoid a small city's worth of rubble and obstacles, he still must have come running as soon as he saw the flare for him to have arrived so quickly.

But then he notices the people *with* Aizawa. The hero is facing another Izuku, with another Hayato at his back.

So this is where Toga ran off to.

Even if Aizawa somehow knows that the 'Izuku' he's facing is fake, he doesn't seem to know that there are *two* Toga Himiko's.

The 'Hayato' standing behind Aizawa grins. He pulls out a knife.

Izuku's breath stutters.

"*Eraserhead!*"

Aizawa turns at his voice, then his eyes widen as he sees Izuku and the real Hayato. He spins around but is too late to stop the blade—

Izuku *pulls* the knife, and the weapon is tugged out of grasp before it hits its target. Aizawa uses that time to quickly bind the doppelganger with his capture weapon. His eyes flash red, and the 'Hayato' turns back into Toga Himiko for a moment before she fades away into tatters and dissipates into thin air.

"Erase... Aizawa-sensei!"

Izuku skids a bit as he lands next to the hero.

"It's Toga Himiko," he says in a rush. "She took the appearance of

Uraraka and the girl from Shiketsu. Uraraka mentioned Toga sucked out her blood during the summer camp... Sensei?"

Aizawa is giving him a strange look. But soon he shakes his head.

"The 'Midoriya' over there already said pretty much the same thing. Guess she repeated what you said. No wonder she sounded so much like you," he mutters, and Izuku instantly understands. Toga must have parroted back Izuku's speculations to Aizawa. Everyone in Class 1-A knows his tendency to ramble, so it would have been pretty convincing.

He swallows. "I don't think she can use the person's quirk, though," he says as he lights a small flame on his index finger as a demonstration. Aizawa nods, readily accepting his opinion.

"I recognize the way the clone disintegrated. All the Dabi's I fought at the summer training camp disappeared like this too. They can't take much force, though. I'm guessing someone in the League has a cloning quirk."

"Twice?" Izuku guesses by process of elimination and Aizawa gives a noncommittal shrug.

Izuku carefully lets Hayato down from his back and faces Toga—who still looks like him—again.

Faced with both Izuku and Aizawa, Toga puts a hand to her face.

"Uh-oh... this is looking bad."

And then she throws a knife at them.

Both Izuku and Aizawa dodge it easily, but Toga/Izuku disappears in that split second. She surges up behind Aizawa, and the hero erases her quirk. Her guise melts away, but she throws dirt in Aizawa's face, making him blink.

Toga turns back into Izuku as the real Izuku tackles her (himself?) away from Aizawa. They grapple as they roll over each other, and Izuku uses his superior strength and Full Cowl to eventually pin her (himself?) down. He's just about to call for Aizawa to bind her with his capture weapon as soon as he gets the dirt out of his eyes. If they can capture a member of the League of Villains, this will be a golden opportunity.

But then a strong gust of wind blows over them all and a familiar voice tinged with desperation calls out.

“Midoriya!!”

Izuku looks up to find Todoroki and Yoarashi jumping down from what looks like a mini tornado. Todoroki is about to run towards him, worry clear on his face— but then, he pauses.

Oh, Izuku realizes.

Toga Himiko is still wearing Izuku’s appearance. Which means, to Todoroki, it looks like Izuku is pinning down another Izuku. Without the information that there’s a doppelganger running around, it must be confusing as hell.

Todoroki looks between the two Izuku’s with a lost expression.

Oh.

Oh, *shit.*

*

It’s a surreal experience, seeing two Midoriya’s.

Shouto looks helplessly between the two Midoriya’s for a wild moment, and the two of them stare back looking equally stunned.

“Todoroki—!”

One Midoriya reaches out for him but is soon intercepted as the other Midoriya knocks the reaching hand away from Shouto.

“Midoriya!” Shouto calls again, but he can’t dare do anything. Yoarashi seems to be sharing the same dilemma. Without knowing what kind of situation or quirk this is, they can’t charge in recklessly least they hurt the real Midoriya, whichever one he is.

One Midoriya pushes off the other and rushes towards them. Both Todoroki and Yoarshi hesitate, not sure if he’s trying to attack them or regroup with them. But they’re saved from having to make a decision by the other Midoriya.

The Midoriya that was running towards them is yanked back by an unseen force, then the other Midoriya is suddenly between them with his back to Todoroki, shielding him with his own body. Flickers of flame run down his arms, ready to burst into familiar wings at the slightest notice.

And with that— Shouto *knows.*

Shouto puts a hand on that Midoriya's shoulder and draws the other boy closer so that he stands next to Shouto instead of in front of him. He shoots ice at the imposter and they backflip away with surprising agility, further proof that they're not the real Midoriya.

The Midoriya that's held in a half-embrace looks up at Shouto with a surprised look.

As if Shouto could ever *not* recognize Midoriya.

Aizawa bursts into the scene, goggles firmly over his eyes as he activates his quirk. The appearance of the fake 'Midoriya' melts away to reveal Toga Himiko.

A very clothless Toga Himiko.

Yoarashi does a spit-take despite not having been drinking anything. But Shouto is barely even bothered. If anything, the reveal of the imposter's identity only makes him more determined to catch her.

Shouto's hand unconsciously tightens where he's holding Midoriya's shoulder. Shouto had seen enough of Toga's character during that video call when Midoriya had been kidnapped. And not that he likes any villains, and especially not anyone in the League, but...

Her fixation on injuring Midoriya makes it just that much more *personal.*

Aizawa has his capture weapon out, Shouto shoots ice to encase her, Midoriya's fire flares out alongside Shouto's ice, and even Yoarashi seems to have clued in and follows their cues by directing gusts of wind to surround Toga Himiko.

But once the dust from their clashing quirks has cleared, Toga Himiko is nowhere in sight.

Midoriya tsks, looking around swiftly.

“Watch out. She has this weird ability to almost disappear from plain sight...”

Eventually, it turns out they didn’t need to look for her.

“Hello hello, Tomura?”

All four of them turn at the sing-song voice to find Toga perched on an outcrop with a phone in her hand. (Shouto has no idea where she pulled that out of, seeing as she’s still naked.) She agilely dodges their attacks as she speaks into the phone.

“Sorry~ I got distracted by Izuku-kun and failed the mission... wait, no, get me out of here! I’m surrounded!”

Then her glazed eyes hone in on Midoriya. Shouto feels the other boy stiffen in the circle of his arm.

“Let’s meet again, Izuku-kun!” Toga blushes as she’s sucked into a portal, too fast for any of them to stop.

A moment of silence passes before Midoriya slumps.

“I’d really rather not,” he mumbles belatedly in response.

Shouto tightens the arm he still has around Midoriya’s shoulders.

“*Villain. Cat. Nip,*” he hisses out between clenched teeth.

“I... you know what, fine, I’m not even going to argue anymore,” Midoriya sighs as he scrubs his hands over his face. Then he lifts his head to give Shouto a brief smile. “Thanks for coming so quickly. And for recognizing me.”

But of course.

“Are you hurt anywhere?” Shouto asks instead of stating the obvious.

“No. But Toga cut Hayato and took a bit of his blood...” Midoriya trails off worriedly, and Shouto follows his gaze to find Aizawa crouched in front of a kid— a member of the HUC, presumably. Leave it to Midoriya to find out his name and befriend him in that short span of time.

They’re not given any more time together, though. Other people, especially their classmates from Class 1-A, also arrive on the scene, and once the police arrive Aizawa, Midoriya, Shouto, Yoarashi, and

the HUC kid are all taken away for debriefing. Shouto and Yoarashi are let out fairly early since their contact with Toga Himiko was minimal, but Aizawa and Midoriya are kept back for far longer.

Even when they're dismissed and Present Mic has come to pick him up, Shouto finds it hard to leave. He keeps turning back to look at the police station where he knows Midoriya is.

"Todoroki," a voice breaks his thoughts, and Shouto turns to find Yoarashi Inasa. The taller boy is wearing a conflicted expression on his face. But then, he slams his head down into the ground, startling Shouto and Present Mic, though the teacher from Shiketsu just sighs as if they're used to it.

"I'm sorry!!! I was too caught up in the past to see who you are now! Please forgive me!"

The straightforward apology catches Shouto by surprise. Truthfully, he'd almost forgotten about his conflict with Yoarashi in the first place.

"...It's fine," he ends up saying. "I sowed the seeds in the first place. And thank you for helping out. We were able to arrive quickly thanks to your wind."

Yosarashi raises his head and looks at Todoroki at that. He makes a small *huh* sound, then grins and gives Shouto a thumbs up with one hand and a thumbs down with the other.

"As I thought. To be so concerned for a friend... you truly do possess a burning passion! Though I still don't really like you!"

Shouto blinks blankly at the two opposing thumbs thrust his way.

He wonders if this is what a combination of Iida and Kirishima with a dash of spite might look like.

Present Mic coughs deliberately, drawing their attention to him.

"This bromance or whatever is going on is great and all, but I do have your results for the Exam. If, you know, you're still interested," he drawls while waving a sheet of paper in the air. The teacher from Shiketsu likewise pulls out a piece of paper, and both Todoroki and Yoarashi are handed their grades.

A moment of silence passes as they read their results.

“Huh.”

*

Unsurprisingly, the Exam is all but forgotten as Izuku is whisked away to be debriefed by the police as soon as possible. The revelation that a member of the League can transform into other people has shaken their investigation, and even Izuku can tell how worried everyone is.

Plus, it’s already bad enough that Toga Himiko has Uraraka’s blood, but Izuku—as much as he hates it—is more valuable in terms of infiltration. He’s already nationally famous, not to mention his connection to All Might. There’s no telling what she can do with his face.

Toga hadn’t been allowed to take too much blood while Izuku had been in the custody of the League since he’d still been critically injured throughout most of his captivity. But they don’t know the specifics of her quirk, so there’s still no telling for how long and how many times Toga can turn into Izuku.

It’s a disaster just waiting to happen.

The police drill Izuku about the three days he spent with the League once more, hoping to glean any new revelations they might have missed. Whatever the League wanted must have been big, if not only Toga but Compress, Kurogiri, and presuamably Twice were all working together, even if only for support. People speculate that maybe they wanted Aizawa’s blood, who’s both a teacher of UA and a pro. Maybe they wanted something with Izuku. Maybe it was something else entirely. Whatever it was, Toga had mentioned she failed the mission, but it still leaves everyone worried. By the time he and Aizawa are dismissed, it’s late into the night and both are thoroughly exhausted.

Once they’re inside the school grounds, Aizawa pauses and sighs.

“I would tell you to go get some sleep, but.” Izuku follows his line of sight to find All Might waiting for them by the gates. The adults must have already talked about this beforehand as All Might nods at the other hero.

“Thanks, Aizawa. I’ll take it from here.”

“...Don’t keep him up too long,” is all Aizawa says. He briefly plops a hand on Izuku’s head and ruffles it before leaving them, slouching towards the teacher’s quarters.

Izuku raises a hand to his head where Aizawa pat him, then turns to All Might. The gaunt man is looking at him like he’s just seen something adorable, but then coughs into his fist when their eyes meet. He waves them over to a bench, then pulls out some files from a briefcase once they’re seated.

“First of all, I believe congratulations are due,” he says while handing Izuku the files.

Izuku opens it to find a grading sheet for the last part of the Provisional Licence Exam. It looks like he hadn’t been doing that bad to begin with, and the way he quickly identified the villain, recovered the hostage, and protected and comforted him had all been seen favourably. With the grading sheet is a small plastic card.

It’s his Provisional Hero Licence.

Izuku stares at it for a long moment.

Later, Izuku is told that the students were graded on how they responded to a real emergency situation. Class 1-A actually had an advantage since they all knew it was a real situation the moment they saw Izuku’s flare, and so were able to respond immediately. Their quick response and the way they immediately tried to evacuate the others didn’t go unnoticed by the proctors even in the chaos, and they were graded accordingly, most passing with—if not flying colours—respectable grades in general.

But right now, it all feels rather... far off. Izuku knows this is a huge step towards becoming the No. 1 hero like he promised (promised All Might, promised his mother, promised himself) but all he can think of is *now Toga has more ways to exploit my face.*

And that just—

“I’m sorry,” Izuku blurts out.

All Might pauses, and only then does Izuku belatedly realize that the hero had been talking animatedly and congratulating him before Izuku had interrupted him. All Might gives him a confused look.

“What for?”

What for? *What for?*

“I—,” Izuku feels the files crumple in his hands. “You heard about Toga Himiko. And, and it’s not like I asked her to do what she did or anything, I know that, but still, I should have— I should have been more careful. I should have been smarter. I should have been *better.*”

Aside from his tendency to mutter about heroes and quirks (and recently his developing tendency to mouth off to villains) Izuku isn’t really on the talkative side. But this time, he can’t stop himself. The words flow out of him like a broken dam. Izuku had been biting back words and swallowing his breakdown ever since Kamino, and Toga coupled with All Might asking *what for* had been the last straw.

What for?

Then Izuku will tell him.

“I shouldn’t have let them take my blood. I shouldn’t have been kidnapped in the first place. It’s my fault you were there that night. It’s my fault you lost One For All. It’s my fault... I never should have received One For All.” And Izuku can't help it. He *laughs*. “Do you know what they call me? I'm *the person who ended All Might.*”

And that’s the heart of the matter, isn’t it? Izuku one-handedly destroyed everything All Might built. He caused the hero to reveal his true form, caused him to lose the last embers of One For All, had even lied by omission and kept Hisashi a secret.

And All Might asks him *what for?*

Izuku drops the crumpled files and buries his face in his hands.

“I promised,” he gasps. That night on Dagoba Beach, when All Might first told him about All For One, Izuku had *promised.* “I promised to break the cycle. I promised to *protect* you. But instead, I ended up shattering the symbol of peace, breaking the pillar of hope.”

Monoma’s right.

In a way, *he killed All Might.*

“I’m so, so *sorry*.”

*

Toshinori is speechless.

Originally, he had only planned to congratulate his boy, then maybe tentatively bring up All For One. He knew young Midoriya must have already been thoroughly drilled today because of the Toga incident, but he couldn't help but worry.

Only now does he realize that he should have been worrying about his boy's mental state, not just his physical.

Reflecting on past events to improve is a good, and perhaps even essential trait. But the level of guilt and self-deprecation Midoriya showed just now goes far beyond that.

Toshinori had never imagined that young Midoriya would be carrying such a burden. His boy is so strong that it never occurred to him. But he should have known. This is the same boy that rejected One For All so that Toshinori could stay as All Might longer. This is the same boy that considered leaving UA to protect his mother.

But no matter how strong he is, his boy is still just that: a *boy*.

Of course he'd have insecurities, doubts, fears. He'd been keeping remarkably calm and collected for weeks, but *of course* that night at Kamino would have been traumatic. And Toga Himiko revealing that she can use him must have been the last straw that broke the camel's back.

And even now, as he's finally going through a breakdown that had been a long time coming, young Midoriya is still near silent. His shoulders are shaking and his breath is stuttering, but no sobs or tears make it past the hands he's buried his face in.

It reminds Toshinori of the way Midoriya Inko cried, and it makes his heart *ache.*

Instead of just flinging his arms around his boy and hugging him *tight* like he wants to, Toshinori makes himself get up from his seat and crouch in front of young Midoriya. Midoriya needs to hear this from him.

"I'm sorry I didn't notice," Toshinori whispers in confession, gentle,

hoping to coax Midoriya to lift his head and meet his eyes. “But my boy, on the contrary, I was grateful to fight All For One. I was grateful it was me, not you.”

But that doesn’t seem to do much to quell the trembling of Midoriya’s shoulders, so Toshinori goes on.

“...You must know Sir Nighteye,” he brings up, and the mention of his former sidekick finally urges Midoriya to peek out between his fingers. Toshinori smiles despite himself, finding Midoriya’s fanboying as adorable as ever. “We had a... falling out, six years ago, when I was injured from my fight with All For One. He tried to persuade me to retire, that his quirk foretold that I’d die a gruesome death at the hands of a villain in six or seven years.”

Young Midoriya’s face whips up at that revelation.

Six or seven years from then. Which means this year, or the next.

Toshinori slowly reaches out for Midoriya’s hands, giving him plenty of time to avoid him, and grasps the boy’s smaller, shaking hands in his.

“When I went up against All For One again in Kamino... I thought that night would be the moment,” Toshinori admits quietly. “Not that I’d quite given up, but I’d... accepted it.”

Young Midoriya’s eyes are wide and panicked at the easy way his hero speaks of death, but Toshinori squeezes his hands and smiles gently.

“But then, *you were there.*”

I am here, All Might had said to countless villains and civilians.

And then his boy had shown Toshinori that *he was there.*

“I would have accepted dying. But you were there. You made me want to live with you. You gave me the will to struggle against fate. You showed me a path past the end goal. You *saved* me.”

Toshinori brings young Midoriya’s hands together in both of his. He looks his boy straight in his wide eyes, and he smiles.

“So my boy. Thank you.”

And now Midoriya is crying, tears spilling over his cheeks, but his eyes are no longer as shadowed and pained as they were.

“You and your waterworks,” Toshinori says fondly, then finally pulls young Midoriya into that hug he wanted and doesn’t bother wiping his own tears.

Midoriya melts into him and they both somehow end up kneeling on the ground, crying and smiling and whispering words of thanks to each other.

There will still be people who call Midoriya things like “the person who ended All Might.” There will still be wounds and bruises. But Toshinori hopes, as he holds his crying heir, to lessen and shield the harm from his boy.

And Toga Himiko may still be out there with a stock of Midoriya’s blood. But Toshinori would like to think that no matter what, he’ll recognize his boy.

*

It’s almost midnight by the time Shouto hears the sound of a door opening and closing in the hallway. The sound is so small that even Shouto, who’s right next doors, wouldn’t have heard it if he hadn’t been listening for it.

Shouto hesitates. Should he just send a message, or should he go over and knock on the door? He wrestles with himself, but in the end, he chooses the latter.

“Sorry,” Shouto blurts out as soon as Midoriya cracks the door open. “I know you should rest, but I couldn’t help…” His voice trails off when he notices that Midoriya’s eyes are red. Shouto’s apologetic tone rapidly turns alarmed. “What happened?!”

“Shhh,” Midoriya puts a finger to his lips, then opens the door further and gestures inside.

Shouto had originally planned to just make sure Midoriya was alright and leave him to rest, but he clearly *isn’t* alright, so he steps inside Midoriya’s room.

“Are you hurt? What’s wrong?” he frets as soon as Midoriya closes the door.

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” Midoriya assures as he takes a seat on his bed and pats the space next to him expectantly. He gives Shouto a smile once he obediently sits down, and despite his red-rimmed eyes, that smile doesn’t fail to make Shouto relax a bit.

“It’s just... I’ve been a bit stressed, ever since Kamino, and... that thing with Toga was, in many ways, the last straw. I feel better now that I’ve let it out, though.” And Midoriya truly does look a bit... lighter.

Shouto sighs in relief, then reaches out with his right hand to cover Midoriya’s eyes.

Midoriya doesn’t even startle or flinch away at the sudden movement. The implicit trust in that simple gesture makes Shouto’s heart squeeze in his ribcage.

Once Shouto uses his quirk to cool the palm over his reddened eyes, Midoriya moans and slumps forward a bit, pressing his face further into Shouto’s hand. Shouto finds his eyes caught on the way Midoriya’s lips part, moist and pink with pearly white teeth peeking out—

“And to think that I was bragging about how I was fine without you during the first part of the Exam,” Midoriya says with a rueful chuckle, breaking Shouto’s line of thought. “I guess this proves that I really can’t do without you, huh.”

“...Actually,” Shouto begins hesitantly. He’d said he’d tell Midoriya about this later, but. This might as well be as good a timing as ever. “It’s me that can’t do without you.”

“Hm?” Midoriya hums languidly, still with his upper face planted in Shouto’s hand. It’s positively adorable, and Shouto feels a smile creep up his face despite the words he’s about to utter.

“I didn’t pass the Exam.”

His voice is low and calm, composed. He’s already accepted and made peace with the result. But Midoriya gives a full-body jolt at the revelation and his head snaps up from Shouto’s cool hand in alarm.

“What?! How... Is it... did... It’s because of me, isn’t it?” he whispers in horror. “It’s because I sent up that signal flare and distracted you. *Fuck,* I’m so sorry—!”

But Shouto stops Midoriya’s rant by gently grasping his forearm.

“No, it’s not your fault. Rather, it’s thanks to you that I even got a chance to retake the Exam later,” Shouto explains patiently. He’s already anticipated that Midoriya might panic like this. He knows only too well about the boy’s selfless tendencies, after all. “Yoarashi Inasa... said some things about me and my father, and I lost my cool. We fought each other and lost too many points. But when I saw your beacon, I asked him to help you and he eventually agreed. Apparently that worked in our favour, and the grading sheet said our willingness to put that behind us to help you was enough to get a second chance.”

He pauses, then gives Midoriya a look.

“Bakugo failed too, but only because he was being himself.”

That manages to wrangle a small laugh out of Midoriya, and Shouto smiles in success. His hand slips from Midoriya’s forearm to lightly hold his fingertips.

“Don’t worry. I’ll catch up to you soon.”

Midoriya just looks at him for a moment, but then he *smiles* with such tenderness that it takes Shouto’s breath away.

“I’ll be waiting.”

*

The past day has left Izuku emotionally exhausted, but talking to All Might and Todoroki has, as always, made him feel better. Izuku hadn’t noticed how much he’d missed talking to the hero while they’d been carefully keeping distance in the wake of the Kamino fallout. Now that he’s less stressed, he’s rather embarrassed by the way he uncharacteristically just lost it in front of All Might.

And Todoroki, well.

As Izuku has already said, the other boy has this ability to understand and make Izuku feel better with just a few words. He’s amazing.

Todoroki would probably groan and facepalm again if Izuku says that to his face, though.

Anyways, today is the first day of the second semester, and the class is

abuzz with the internships the Principal mentioned during the opening ceremony. Aizawa goes into more detail during homeroom and the students talk amongst themselves during the break.

“What do you think?” Todoroki asks as he takes the empty seat behind Izuku’s, as has become custom. Izuku turns around to straddle his chair and face Todoroki.

“I’m… I’m not sure,” he says honestly. “I mean, normally, this would be a great opportunity. But what with Toga running around… I’m not sure if it’d be the best for me to go outside so much.”

(The class had already been told about Toga Himiko’s ability and that she could turn into both Uraraka and Izuku. It had, unsurprisingly, caused some unease, but in true Class 1-A fashion, everyone had tried to joke and lighten the air.)

(“Well, at least we know she can’t use the quirk of whoever she turns into.”

“Yeah, just ask Uraraka to float something if she seems fishy, and just tell Midoriya he looks like a rabbit.”

“I do *not* look like a—!”

“Yup, this one’s ours.”)

“But then on the other hand, I can’t hide forever. And besides, crisis and peril are in the job description of a hero,” Izuku points out.

Todoroki puts his chin on his palm. He himself can’t go on an internship this semester because he’s yet to get his Provisional Licence, but he seems interested in Izuku’s decision. “Do you have somewhere in mind?”

Izuku glances at the other boy from under his lashes.

“I did consider going to Endeavor’s this time, but… I don’t really want to, if it’s not with you.”

Todoroki’s chin drops out of his palm. And then he groans and buries his face in his hands, his ears pink.

“How do you keep saying things like that? With that honest, sincere *face*…”

Izuku blinks.

Really?

He pokes Todoroki, but the boy refuses to lift his head for the rest of break time.

Izuku mulls over his choices the next few days. He does want to do an intern. But he's also worried about Toga. Not just about what she can do while he's interning, but in the long run too. Knowing that she can't use his quirk is a good beginning, but he has to do better than that. He has to be more prepared. He needs to be able to predict her moves and be three steps ahead of her.

He needs to learn from someone who excels in that kind of planning.

So Izuku goes through the several thousand hero agencies that offered internships to him back at the Sports Festival and tries to pick out the ones that have heroes or sidekicks who are famed for their foresight, prediction, and planning.

Except… there's one name that isn't in the list that Izuku has in mind.

Sir Nighteye.

All Might mentioned him when they talked the night of the Provisional Licence Exam. The more Izuku thinks about it, the more Sir Nighteye seems like the best candidate. Not only is his quirk actually Foresight, but he was All Might's one and only sidekick which means he would have had plenty of experience and that he probably knows of One For All.

But they had a falling out, All Might mentioned.

Izuku is pondering whether he should go for it and ask All Might for an introduction or not when his decision is sealed a few days later.

The three seniors known as the "Big 3" come in to explain about the internship, much to mixed reactions. One person—Amajiki Tamaki—almost immediately turns his back to the class and tries to hide his face against a wall, while the girl that introduces herself as Hado Nejire flits about, asking questions about anything and everything and moving on before even waiting for an answer.

When she gets to Izuku, she claps her hands merrily.

"Ah, it's you! The celebrity!"

Suddenly, Izuku feels the urge to join Amajiki in his wall hiding.

*

“That was fun~!” Nejire bounces along as Mirio and Tamaki follow.

They’ve just ended their session with Class 1-A. They’ve been getting a lot of attention, what with all the villain encounters and their overall high placement in the Sports Festival, but they still hadn’t been a match for Mirio’s carefully cultivated tactics and experience.

Well, except for one.

Midoriya Izuku, the “celebrity” as Nejire called him (though Mirio noted with amusement that the kid looked as shy and unused to attention as Tamaki when she called him that) had accurately predicted some of Mirio’s moves. And he’d had some sort of quirk that could *pull* him. It didn’t work while he was completely phasing, but if even the smallest bit of him was corporeal, he’d be snared by Midoriya’s quirk.

It had almost turned into a stalemate, but Mirio’s superior experience had given him the skill and quick thinking to beat him in the end.

“Hey hey, what did you guys think?” Nejire asks.

Tamaki shivers.

“One of the two guys who only had to watch because they don’t have their licence… Bakugo? He was chomping at the bit. So scary…”

Nejire laughs as if Tamaki has just told the best joke, then pokes Mirio’s side. “Whata ‘bout you, Mirio? How was Midoriya? He lasted longer than anyone before!”

Mirio thinks back on Midoriya.

He grins.

“I’ve a feeling Sir would like him!”

It’d be fun to work with Midoriya at Sir Nighteye’s, Mirio thinks.

*

He didn't think it'd actually come true so soon.

*

After Class 1-A gets their asses collectively handed to them single-handedly by Togata Mirio ("*I* didn't lose to him, stop grouping me in, you losers!" "To be fair, your explosions wouldn't have done anything to him either, Kacchan—") Izuku feels the importance of prediction and the experience to back it up all the more.

So he sucks it up and braves asking All Might.

Who promptly introduces him to Togata Mirio again, not Sir Nighteye.

"Togata was... *is* the person Nighteye recommended to me as my heir," All Might confesses in a quiet voice as they head to the room Togata is waiting for them in. Izuku starts at that, and the hero gives him a smile with mixed emotions. "I had already set my heart on you, though, so when I told him that he was... he didn't take it well. We haven't talked to each other since."

And that's just sad, isn't it? Especially since All might still clearly cares about Sir Nighteye, enough to keep tabs on him and know that Togata is still interning there.

The two enter the room before Izuku can say anything, though, and Togata meets them buoyantly. He doesn't question that All Might would go this far for a mere student (and Izuku wonders if Togata just assumes All Might is doing his best as a teacher, or if he too has heard rumours of their relationship) but he does turn to Izuku before agreeing.

"Well... first off, what kind of hero do you want to be? Why do you want to be a hero?"

Izuku hesitates at that.

Uraraka and Iida had asked this too, back when they were preparing for the Sports Festival. Izuku hadn't been able to answer then, and he'd gladly used All Might calling him as an excuse to run away from the question.

But. His friends had taught Izuku that it isn't something he has to hide. The friends who know his past still treat him the same as they always did. So Izuku... Izuku feels okay saying this.

He doesn't want to dump his Tragic Backstory™ on them like this, of course, but more than that, he doesn't want to lie, even by omission. Not anymore. And especially not on this subject. He owes Togata… he owes *All Might* his honesty.

"...My father started beating my mother when I was three," Izuku begins in a quiet voice. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees All Might stiffen and Togata's smile freeze on his face. But he keeps his gaze down and continues in a low voice.

"I... I was too young, too small, too *weak* to stop him from beating her. So I did the only thing I could. I stepped between them. And it got my father mad enough that he beat me instead of my mother."

Togata has gone deathly still and a strangled sound that's almost a whimper makes its way out of All Might's throat. But Izuku forces himself to ignore them and continue because he doesn't know if he'll be able to speak again if he stops now.

"It happened again, and again, and again. Eventually, my father completely left my mother alone and just started coming straight for me. And I— I was so *proud,* because even if I couldn't completely save my mother, I could at least protect her from more harm. But my mother..."

Izuku takes in a deep breath.

"She *cried.* She *apologized.*"

The memory of broken sobs fills his head.

I'm so, so sorry, Izuku.

"...I couldn't understand for the longest time. But Eraserhead taught me that sacrificing yourself isn't always the answer. All Might showed me that it's not enough to just protect someone from physical harm. A true hero saves what's in here, too." He places a hand on his chest,

over his beating heart.

Izuku lifts his head. His gaze is steady.

“That’s the kind of hero I want to be. That’s why I want to be a hero. So that I don’t stop at merely protecting people, but so that I can *save* them.”

*

Sir Nighteye sits at his desk and waits for Mirio to bring Midoriya Izuku for his interview.

He hasn’t told anyone, but Nighteye has already decided he’s going to hire the boy. This is the protégé All Might has chosen, and Nighteye will judge him in his own den.

So far, Nighteye has to grudgingly admit that Midoriya Izuku isn’t half bad as the heir to One For All. He has a strong base quirk, as demonstrated in the Sports Festival. He’s faced villains and survived time and again. And then there was that incident with Stain.

The press may have played it off as Endeavor’s arrest, but Nighteye is too perceptive to be fooled. The man had looked far too disgruntled for having caught the infamous Hero Killer, but he hadn’t denied it either. That probably means there was some cover-up, and the presence of the three students (Midoriya amongst them) suggests that *they* may have been the ones who actually caught Stain.

And seeing as he’s requested an internship, Midoriya must have also passed the Provisional Licence Exam.

So. Midoriya Izuku has potential. He isn’t a bad candidate as the heir of One For All.

But being the heir of *All Might* is an entirely different matter.

No matter what kind of personality this Midoriya Izuku may have, Nighteye firmly believes that Mirio is closer to the ideal No. 1 hero that All Might envisions. He’s *positive* about that. But All Might himself had been equally—if not more—adamant about his choice.

Well, then.

Your heir that I chose, and the heir that you chose for yourself. Nighteye will compare them side by side.

That's why he agreed to let Midoriya come, why he's already decided to hire him.

Soon enough Mirio cheerily leads in a familiar face that had been broadcasted on national television and had been populating the internet. Midoriya Izuku steps inside, takes a deep breath, and then freezes.

Nighteye sees the boy go wide- and starry-eyed at the sight of all the All Might merchandise hanging on proud display. (Yes, that *is* the 10th anniversary not-for-sale tapestry.) Midoriya manages to snap himself out of it, though, and sketches a polite bow.

"Hello! I am Midoriya Izuku from UA, and I would like to—!"

"I already know all that," Nighteye interrupts. "Obviously," he adds haughtily as an afterthought.

He motions for Mirio and Bubble Girl to leave the office, and once he's alone with Midoriya Nighteye clasps his hands and looks at him over the rim of his glasses.

"So, you wish to intern under me."

"Ah, yes Sir! Not only were you All Might's esteemed sidekick, but you excel in analyzation and prediction. I don't know if you've heard, but a villain, Toga Himiko, has been confirmed to be able to take my appearance. I need to be able to prepare for her and be three steps ahead of her, and Togata-senpai's prowess has shown that your guidance would be an immense help."

"None of that interests me," Nighteye says brusquely. "Those are what *you* would gain by interning here. But I fail to see what merit *I* would gain by employing you."

He may have already decided to hire Midoriya, but that doesn't mean he has to make it easy for the boy.

And if he's being honest, he may be just the slightest bit... *bitter*.

Nighteye never claimed to be a good person.

But instead of being intimidated, Midoriya just looks genuinely taken

back.

“Oh. I thought that was obvious.”

Nighteye raises an eyebrow.

“Oh? Pray tell.”

He waits for the boy to boast of his petty victories, to claim that he is worthier than the sidekicks and intern Nighteye has hand-picked and spent years tuning into a well-oiled machine.

He never expected the words Midoriya Izuku actually utters.

“I’m your bridge between you and All Might.”

If Nighteye had been standing, he would have lost his footing.

“What— how— You *dare*—?”

He can’t even— And Midoriya has the gall to keep going while Nighteye is at a loss for words.

“I don’t want to presume,” he says carefully. “I don’t know everything that happened between you. But All Might mentioned you two had a falling out. And he also said that butting into other people’s business is the essence of a hero.”

He would have. That’s exactly the kind of logic the All Might that Nighteye knows would have said, and hearing that familiar phrase makes something in his chest *ache*.

Midoriya looks down at his right hand. “Recently, a friend told me that just because you love someone doesn’t mean everything you do to each other is alright. But it still means that you can *try*.”

Nighteye’s breath threatens to stutter at what Midoriya is implying.

Try. With All Might.

“...What makes you think All Might loves me?” he manages to ask in a strangled voice.

He doesn’t bother asking what makes him think Nighteye loves All Might. His affection and respect for the hero is on proud display even at this very moment, after all.

Midoriya Izuku meets his gaze calmly. And he states with unwavering conviction.

“All Might loves you.”

And at that— Nighteye can’t help it. Even if this is a complete stranger to him, even if Midoriya doesn’t know what transpired between them, he’s All Might’s chosen one. And the way he stated it so surely, like it was an absolute *fact*...

It validates something even Nighteye himself hadn’t been aware was needed, reassures his worries, soothes him.

Nighteye recalls the last phone call he’d had with All Might.

It had been almost a year ago. All Might had called to tell him that he’d found a successor. And Nighteye had been livid and *hurt* that he’d decide something so important without even consulting him.

But on the other hand, he’d been *over the moon* that All Might had called at all.

And he’d called because of Midoriya.

Midoriya promised he’d be a bridge between the two of them, but he already has been, even if he didn’t know it.

“*All Might loves you*,” Midoriya had said. And Nighteye can’t help it.

He *smiles*.

The tilt of his lips may be a little sad, the slant of his brows may be a little relieved, and there may be tears in his eyes. But the smile is no less genuine.

Nighteye clears his throat loudly and stands up before Midoriya can do more than widen his eyes at the sight of the cold hero tearing up.

“Contract,” he says stiffly while thrusting out his hand.

“Huh...? Oh!” Midoriya roots around his bag before pulling out the contract for the internship.

Nighteye takes the sheet, slams the seal down on it, gives it back to Midoriya, and pushes him out the door in quick succession. He finds Mirio waiting outside with a worried expression.

“Mirio. He’s hired.”

And then he slams the door.

Midoriya stands there with a confused look on his face, dazedly holding the stamped internship contract. Mirio blinks too, but then grins and slaps Midoriya on the back.

“Well, I’m not quite sure what just happened, but Sir was smiling. Congratulations! I look forward to working with you, Kouhei!”

Midoriya looks up at him with wide eyes for a moment.

But then, he *grins*.

And, oh. Yes, Mirio is looking forward to working with this Midoriya Izuku.

*

Later that day, Izuku looks up from his homework when his phone pings. He opens it to find a message from Todoroki.

[Do you have any leftover band-aids?]

Izuku responds immediately.

[where are you and what have you done]

[In my room.]

[Remidial class.]

Izuku ditches his homework, picks up the fully kitted first-aid kit he’d had since he was little, and goes knocking on Todoroki’s door.

Todoroki opens it with a sheepish smile, but then winces at the way it tugs on the scrapes and bruises on his face.

Izuku shoos him inside and sits Todoroki on the futon.

“I got the original band-aids wet when I was washing,” Todoroki explains as Izuku gently takes his face in both his hands and examins his injuries. They don’t look too deep and the scrapes are scabbing, but the bruises will start turning into a painful purple soon.

Izuku tuts as he opens his first-aid kit. “Are you hurt anywhere else?”

“A bit here and there, but they’re fine. And you don’t have to bother, I can do it myself—” Izuku silences him with a pointed glare. Todoroki cuts himself off, but instead of being intimidated, he just looks so incredibly fond.

“So,” Todoroki resumes talking once Izuku is hovering over his face, reapplying salve and bandages. “I spent my weekend getting beat up at remedial class. How was yours?”

“Um,” Izuku gently presses a band-aid over the bridge of Todoroki’s nose. “I may have impertinently vowed to reconcile two people who’ve only talked to each other once in the past six years and now have no idea how to actually do it?”

Todoroki snorts. Izuku is seized with the impulse to poke the bruise on his cheek.

“Hey, it’s not funny,” he grouses, even as he spreads salve over a cut on Todoroki’s chin with painstaking care. “You’re the one who said that if you love each other, you can still try. So, any ideas?”

Todoroki is quiet for a while. He reaches up and takes Izuku’s right hand and starts tracing the scars, as he’s taken to sometimes doing. Izuku lets him, finishing treating the other boy one-handed. Izuku manages to dress all the wounds on his face by the time he speaks up again.

“I heard that... my father tried to visit my mother at the hospital.”

Izuku stills at the quiet words. He puts down the roll of gauze and sits down next to Todoroki, giving him his full attention.

“He was rejected, of course. But he still sends her flowers. And apparently... they’re her favourite kind. ...Even *I* didn’t know she liked

them, but *he* did, and he remembered."

Todoroki looks conflicted. "It's not that I've forgiven or forgotten what he's done. But... it looks like maybe, my mother is willing to try. Not now, but... someday. *Maybe*."

The way he emphasizes the "maybe" part is adorable, Izuku thinks as he bites his lower lip. Todoroki is clearly skeptical and reluctant, but he isn't completely opposed either, if only for the sake of his mother. And that he's sharing this with Izuku means *worlds* to him.

"So I guess what I'm trying to say is... maybe start with little things? Even if they don't see or talk to each other directly, things like that might erode some of the... *everything* between them."

Izuku gazes at Todoroki for a few more moments before reaching out to gently grasp the tips of his fingers, just like Todoroki had done a few days ago.

"Thank you," he says, and he doesn't mean just for the advice. He's thanking Todoroki for opening up so much of himself, for sharing something like this.

Todoroki smiles, gentle and easy.

"Any time."

*

So later that evening, Izuku sends All Might a series of text messages.

[Did Sir Nighteye have his office covered with your merchandise when he was working with you too?]

[He even had the 10th anniversary poster!]

[Most of my All Might Shrine was printed out on A4 at the public library]

[Not that that's bad, but]

[THE NOT FOR SALE 10TH ANNIVERSARY POSTER]

[I WAS SOOOOOOO JEALOUS]

(Unkown to Izuku, All Might sputters and almost drops his phone into his bubble bath as he reads the texts. He isn't sure what he's supposed to be more surprised about; that apparently Nighteye has taken up a new hobby while they'd been separated, or the fact that young Midoriya has an actual *shrine* of him.)

(Well. He supposes he knows what he's getting his boy for his birthday... ...though it does feel like it'd be really, really weird to buy his own merchandise.)

*

Izuku's internship begins right away, and he's called to Sir Nighteye's office the very next day.

"Today we're doing patrol and surveillance," one of the sidekicks, Bubble girl, explains. "The Nighteye Agency is currently conducting a secret investigation on a small designated villain organization called the Shie Hassaikai."

After some debriefing, Izuku is paired off with Togata to go patrol. But before he goes, he calls out.

"Oh, Sir Nighteye! All Mm..."

Actually, it's probably not smart to talk about All Might in public since they're still denying any personal connection with each other. Not that he doesn't trust Togata or Bubble Girl, but the fewer people who know, the better.

"Um," Izuku wracks his mind, then figures that Nighteye would probably know All Might's real name. "*Toshinori-san* asked me to wish you a good morning!"

It had been a thrilling moment. All Might had tentatively asked Izuku to pass on the greeting once he mentioned he'd start his internship today. Izuku recognized it as the hesitant step forward, and he'd been

happy for his mentor. Izuku had never been able to leave a person in need of help, after all, and that applies even if—or perhaps all the more because—that person is his hero. All Might is hurt, Sir Nighteye is hurt, and he genuinely hopes they can heal and reach out to each other again.

But Sir Nighteye's expression is thunderous.

"*You know that name?!*"

"Eeep!"

Abort abort abort—!

But Nighteye just turns around with a *hmph.* And then he says quietly, as if to himself.

"...He did, did he."

And a faint smile curves his lips before he turns completely away from Izuku.

"Go on, now. Mirio knows the ropes, so watch and learn from him."

Izuku lets out a relieved sigh and obediently follows his upperclassman to the streets.

"Right! Let's go then! But on second thought, I guess you're familiar with patrolling since you went on the first intern after the Sports Festival, right?" Togata asks, as bright and energetic as ever.

"Actually, I didn't get to experience the normal training course," Izuku admits. He'd been too busy getting beat up... I mean, being trained to use Full Cowl by Gran Torino in his previous internship. The one time they did try to go on a patrol and do standard intern things they ran into Nomus and Stain, and then Izuku spent the rest of his intern time in the hospital (or breaking out for icecream). "It's my first time on a patrol, so I'll be in your care."

"Whoa, seriously?! Then leave it to me!"

Togata leads the way to the more populated areas, buoyantly explaining little tidbits. People start to take notice of them, partly due to their hero costumes, and partly because he's, well, *Midoriya Izuku.*

The Kamino incident hasn't been quite forgotten yet, and Izuku can feel the looks and whispers he's getting. All Might might have helped

him feel better about the whole thing, but Izuku has never been good with attention being focused on him, not like this. And come to think of it, this is the first time Izuku's been in full public since that night.

Perhaps he senses the way Izuku has tensed up as Togata slaps his back.

"Ease up!" he says with a grin. "Smile! Man, you really are similar to Tamaki. But being known and popular is essential in the present-day hero business! So lift your head and accept it with pride!" Togata flashes him a thumbs up.

And that... Izuku had been worried that telling Togata about even a portion of his past might change the way the senior looks at him. He didn't want pity, didn't wanted to be treated like glass, didn't want to be seen as breakable.

But thankfully, Togata is as bright and cheerful as ever. What's more, he expects Izuku to keep up and pull his weight.

Izuku grins back.

"Thank you, Senpai."

They continue patrolling for a while when a small figure bursts out of an alleyway and bumps into Izuku's leg.

"Oh," Izuku says as he crouches down righten the girl. "I'm sorry. Were you hurt?"

But the moment their eyes meet, Izuku *freezes* because he sees familiar fear and desperation in the girl's red eyes.

"That's no good," a voice calls out from behind the girl. "You shouldn't bother the heroes, Eri."

And Izuku looks up from the girl to see none other than *Chisaki Kai*, the *leader* of the Shie Hassaikai.

The man smiles under his distinctive plague mask. "Apologies for my daughter. She gets carried away while playing and hurts herself sometimes." And the man keeps *smiling* that fake smile, as if this girl hasn't frozen in fear the moment she heard his voice, as if these wounds can be brushed off as simple scrapes, as if Izuku doesn't know *exactly* what's going on.

So Izuku meets his eyes.

He bares his teeth.

And he *grins right back.*

“I’m the one who should be apologizing,” he says, grinning with a mouthful of bared teeth, but his next words aren’t to Chisaki. He carefully circles his arms around the girl that’s clinging to him and asks her, his tone softening and his gaze gentle. “Are you alright?”

The girl looks up at him with wide eyes.

Chisaki doesn’t give her a chance to answer.

“She’ll be fine. Come along, Eri.”

But Eri doesn’t say a word. She only fists her small hands in Izuku’s hero suit with a sort of desperation, and Izuku *knows.*

“Excuse me, but, your daughter seems to be frightened by something,” Izuku says, looking up at Chisaki again, though his grin has turned into something sharper. He lets Eri cling to him and supports her weight in a hug that he hopes she finds reassuring. “And these wounds are too severe to have come from just playing around.”

Izuku can feel Togata trying to subtly stop him, and he understands. This is the organization Sir Nighteye had been hounding, so it might hinder their investigation if Chisaki gets suspicious.

But Izuku knows. He *knows.*

“Trembling in fear without even being able to make a sound isn’t normal for a young child,” he challenges.

“Don’t impose your idea of ‘normal’ on other families,” Chisaki responds.

“People have different characters, after all!” Togata says in an attempt to smooth things over.

But Izuku knows, better than anyone, that just because someone is your father doesn’t mean he won’t *hurt* you.

Izuku’s mind is in overdrive. If this man really is her father, then it will be hard to do something. They’re heroes, not the police, and only student interns at that. They’ll need concrete evidence to do anything.

“Can we at least get her to be checked up at a hospital if you won’t tell us what’s wrong?” Izuku tries. If they can get Eri to a hospital, the doctors might be able to give proof of severe injuries (of *abuse*) and enable them to act. Togata is quiet now, seemingly having caught on or resigned to Izuku’s relentless insistence.

Chisaki looks at him for a long moment. And then, he spreads his arms with a sigh.

“Fine. Heroes really are sensitive about their jobs, I see. If you’re going to hold her, I’ll lead the way. There’s a shortcut through this alley.”

And as the man turns to lead them into the dark alley, he reaches down and begins to peel one glove from his hand.

Killing intent laces the air.

Izuku grits his teeth. He knew it. Chisaki is doing something to Eri. Hurting her. And he’s going to do so again.

Chisaki may be the young boss of the Shie Hassaikai, may be a villain, may be a bad person. But that doesn’t mean Izuku won’t fight him to protect this child. So Izuku prepares to do what he’s always done when he’s found a tormentor and their victim.

He’s about to step between them.

But before he can, Eri beats him to it.

As soon as Chisaki’s killing intent prickles her skin, Eri gasps. Then she unclenches the hands she had fisted in Izuku’s suit, pushes off him, slips under his arms, and turns to face Chisaki with her trembling back to Izuku.

And then, she steps between them.

She steps between them.

Chapter End Notes

Ch. 8 When Like Meets Like: Izuku meets Shouto
Ch. 18 When Like Meets Like - Part Two : Izuku meets Eri

Izuku Headbang

The summary of Burn Your Wings is as follows:
Izuku inherited his parents' quirks, but he swore he'd never use his fire.
He knows first hand how—bright, burning, scorching, painful, terrifying, destructive—it is, after all, and Izuku promised (promised his crying mother, promised his burning self, promised the laughing memory of his father) that he'd become a hero who stops that kind of despair.
Even if he has to burn his own wings to do so.
But when someone with the exact same problems, fears, and pain shows up... Izuku can't help but try to heal them. And in doing so, he himself may be healed too.
I don't know if anyone realized, but it says "them" not "him". Because it has never been just about "him" (Todoroki). It was always about "them" (Todoroki AND Eri)

We'll Be Alright

Chapter Notes

Thank you, sincerely, to everyone who answered my question over on Tumblr, and to everyone who waited a whopping five months (holy heck) for this chapter. Life and writers block have been hard but every time I reread your comments I got the resolve to never abandon this fic. You guys are the true heroes.

Can you tell that I'm happy-crying? Thank you so much for your wonderful art!
Crying Izuku with fire wings by imfantasicbelieveme:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/186343917374
Izuku in hero suit and uniform by sofusgirlart:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/187791516024/sofusgirlart-turned-the-sketch-into-a-full
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/187791527499

Flame angel Izuku by rainydayzer:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/188316365784/i-drew-deku-from-your-fanfic-i-really-hope-you

Also. While writing the 'Deku pins down Toga!Deku and Shouto & Inasa are confused' scene in Ch.18 there was this alternative scene that I couldn't get out of my head... and I made it into a meme. Kinda. I'm sorry. I regret everything. If you wanna check it out, here's the link... but beware of OOC, bad photoshopping, bad drawing, tonal whiplash, and ruining the mood of the end of last chapter and this chapter. Proceed at your own risk. I'm sorry.
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/188516800104/ch-19-of-byw-is-still-in-the-works-i-promise

Also also, I've been getting some questions on BYW!Izuku's exact hairstyle. I think it's fine to imagine him however you see it, but if you really want to know how I picture it, then, uh.
Do you guys know Worick from the anime Gangsta? I picture Izuku's hairstyle to be similar to his, except shorter (about chin length), curlier, fluffier, and, of course, greener.

So basically Worick + lop eared rabbit + green = BYW!Izuku

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being used to something is a frightening thing.

Izuku and Inko had been too used to Hisashi, too used to violence and pain, too used to fear and despair that they never tried to run away. They never tried to change Hisashi. They never dared to even think they could ever go against him.

It was doubly true for Izuku. He hadn't had a choice to begin with; he was just born into it. He hadn't known it was even wrong until much later. Parents are absolute figures to a young child, after all, and no matter what, Hisashi was and still is Izuku's father.

Izuku was too used to Hisashi's violence, too used to his mother's sobs, that he never thought there could be another way.

So no, unlike Eri, Izuku himself has never tried to run away. He's never even thought of it as a possibility. But as someone who has also been subject to abuse, as someone who has also learned the world was cruel before daring to hope it could be kind, as someone who has also known pain and despair and *resignation* at far too young an age, he can guess just how hard it must have been for her to try to escape. How scared Eri must have been. How much courage it must have taken. How desperate she must have been for her to reach out and cling to a total stranger like him.

And despite all that, when Chisaki threatened Izuku, *she stepped between them.*

Despite all the courage she must have scrounged up to escape, despite the punishment that might be awaiting her, she still chose to return.

She chose to protect Izuku.

...When Izuku first stepped between his parents and took the beating for Inko, his mother had cried.

"*I'm so sorry,*" she had sobbed. "*I'm so, so sorry.*"

Even Todoroki had half commanded and half begged him after the Stain incident. *"Don't do that. Don't push me away, or put yourself in harm for me. Don't* ***do*** *that."*

After talking about the difference between protecting and saving

people with All Might and the need to save yourself too with Eraserhead, Izuku thought he knew what they were talking about.

But Izuku realizes that only now does he truly understand.

He *understands.*

Izuku watches with horror choking his throat and guilt burning his stomach as Eri leaves his arms to return to Chisaki (to her *abuser*). He unconsciously reaches out after her but Togata grabs him and anchors Izuku down, frantically shaking his head, silently begging him to stop.

But Izuku can't.

"*Eri.*"

The girl pauses just before she reaches Chisaki. She turns her head to look back at Izuku and he finds something far too familiar in her empty eyes.

Resignation.

Oh, *no.*

"You don't have to," Izuku tells her despite Togata's best efforts to get over this encounter quietly. He understands the senior, he really does, but he also understands *Eri.* He *needs* to tell her this. "You don't have to stay. You can *leave*."

It's something Izuku himself had never learned but *desperately* wants Eri to believe right now.

Eri looks back at him with wide eyes.

But before she can make a decision, Chisaki positions himself so that his body hides Eri and Izuku from each other's sight.

"Yes. We'll be doing just that: leaving. Thank you for your concern," he says, still smiling that fake smile behind his mask. And at his voice Eri turns her back again, shoulders drooped, head down, following Chisaki wordlessly.

Izuku watches them go with something like despair curling in his gut.

“I’m sorry,” Togata says as soon as the two are out of earshot. He’s still holding Izuku, still restraining him, and the other boy squeezes his hands on Izuku’s shoulders as if to emphasize his point. “I’m sorry, Midoriya. I know it must be hard for you to let something like that go, especially with your... your background, but we need to be cautious. Sir has been hounding the Shie Hassaikai for weeks. We can’t ruin that by getting Chisaki’s guard up. At worst, we might just make him hide and lose the chance to save that girl completely!”

It’s only then that Togata tentatively lets Izuku go.

“Let’s call Sir,” he continues. Togata is a good person, after all, and he looks absolutely distraught at the position he’s put in. Having to tell one abuse victim not to help another possible victim must be stressful for him too, but he’s trying his best to be level-headed just like he was taught by Sir Nighteye. “We can’t move rashly. Let’s wait for his order.”

There are so many things he wants to say to that but Izuku bites his tongue. Because despite their disagreement, he really does understand Togata’s reasoning.

Sir Nighteye split their team so that one team would have a pro hero and a sidekick while the other consisted of only two student interns. It’s obvious from the unbalanced constitution that Sir Nighteye and Bubble Girl were planning to do anything actually involving the villain organization while Izuku and Togata were only ever supposed to do a light patrol around town. But now that Izuku and Togata have unexpectedly met the leader of the Shie Hassaikai, it’s only logical from an investigation standpoint to wait for Sir Nighteye’s judgement.

Izuku understands Togata’s reasoning. He really does.

It’s just that he understands Eri *more*.

*

It starts raining as Sir Nighteye and Bubble Girl meet up with Togata and Izuku.

“I’m sorry! We messed up!” Togata speaks up first before Izuku can say anything. Izuku notes the way the senior firmly says ‘we’ even

though it was only Izuku who complicated things, demonstrating that Togata is willing to shoulder the burden together with Izuku should they be faulted. A wave of appreciation for the senior washes over Izuku even in these circumstances. “To think that we bumped into him like you’d expect to meet a transfer student in some manga…!”

“No, it’s my fault,” Sir Nighteye objects, and Izuku can feel the way he subtly softens towards Togata. “I could have prevented this if I’d ‘seen’ you.”

“At least you guys are alright!” Bubble Girl tries to look on the bright side.

“…Only because Eri protected us,” Izuku objects quietly. Both adults turn to him as Togata’s face falls at the reminder. “Apparently Chisaki has a daughter. He called her Eri, and she… she had bandages all over her arms and legs. She was *terrified*. I think she was trying to escape from him, but I… we…”

He isn’t sure how to word what happened without it sounding like an accusation, to either himself or Togata.

“I wish we could have protected her,” is what he settles on, and it’s woefully lacking.

But Sir Nighteye gives him a *look* at his words.

“Don’t be so arrogant,” he says brusquely. “The world isn’t so easy that you can save someone just because you want to.”

No, the world isn’t easy. It’s not fair either, and it certainly isn’t *kind*.

“If you hurry, you’ll ruin everything. If you chase him rashly, he’ll run and hide even further. You’re not so special that you can save anyone when you want to. First, we need to predict what he wants to do, and then analyze until we’re sure we are fully prepared.”

And that’s exactly the kind of tactical planning Izuku came here to learn.

But…

He didn’t mean for the next words to slip out of his mouth, but he can’t help himself.

“But how many tears must Eri spill in the meantime…?”

And unknown to Izuku, a jolt goes down Nighteye's spine at those words.

When All Might first fought All For One six years ago, he'd been so injured in the aftermath that he could barely even walk. And even so, he had still tried to go out and save people.

"*It's no use*," Nighteye had said to All Might. "*You must retire.*"

"*Haven't you seen... the news? The people are... calling for me. If they are waiting... then I must go.*"

That relentlessness was part of what made All Might the hero he was, part of why Nighteye admired him so much. But there's a point where even the best quality becomes a hindrance.

It pained Nighteye to have to say this to the hero (to *his* hero), but he hardened his heart and tried his best to be calm and rational. He tried to reason with and convince All Might to retire now. Nezu supported him while Gran Torino silently watched on. And when they eventually came upon what Nighteye 'saw' with his Foresight, even Nighteye couldn't stop himself from raising his voice.

"*Even if you retire, the next No.1 will appear! There may be some commotion in between, but we might be able to avoid your fate!*"

Nighteye thought, and still thinks to this day, that it was the only reasonable course of action.

But All Might had looked at him with fire burning in his hooded eyes.

"*And how many people must live in fear in the meantime?*"

It's the fundamental reason that made Nighteye and All Might part ways. For all their time together as hero and sidekick, All Might would not bend to Nighteye's reasoning to see the big picture. Nighteye just could not understand All Might's insistence, his almost obsessive adamance that he had to save everyone possible as soon as possible.

But now, the heir that All Might chose comes to him and asks "*But how many tears must Eri spill in the meantime?*"

And Nighteye realizes then and there that this must be one of the reasons (perhaps even *the* reason) that All Might chose Midoriya as his

heir. That fundamental drive, that fire that burns your own body as fuel, that all-consuming *need* to save, that which Nighteye just could not understand in All Might...

Midoriya has it too.

*

Izuku and Togata are sent back as the adults process the new information. Both are quiet on the ride home and they part at school with few words.

Later that evening in his dorm room, Izuku calls his mother.

"...Hi, Mom."

"Hello, honey!" Inko responds with a bright voice.

Izuku lies down on his bed and stares up at his ceiling.

"You sound happy. Did something good happen?"

"Oh, darling, is it that obvious? Well, Mitsuki says she found this adorable new dessert café, so we're going to try it out tomorrow! If it's nice, maybe we can go together the next time you come home to celebrate you getting your provisional hero licence—"

Izuku listens to his mother chatter on happily as his thoughts drift.

Some nights, he's still woken from sleep by the phantom memories of Hisashi's laughs and Inko's screams. It's ridiculous, as it's so far behind them already. Most people don't even remember when they were three or four or even five years old. But it still clings to Izuku like bloodstains on a wall, still haunts him like the scars on his back.

"*I'm sorry*," Inko had sobbed. "*I'm so, so sorry, Izuku*."

And now, Izuku finally understands what he'd done to her that day. He truly understands what he put her through.

Inko cheerily chatters on. Izuku listens to her voice until she admonishes herself and asks him a question.

“Oh, look at me, rambling on like that. Was there a reason you called, honey?”

And at that question, Izuku dearly wants to blurt out “*I’m so sorry*.” He wants to tell her about Eri. He wants to apologize. He wants to cry.

He doesn’t.

Part of the reason he doesn’t is that anything related to the Shie Hassaikai is strictly classified. Part of it’s because he doesn’t quite know how to even begin talking about all this. And part of it’s because he doesn’t want to remind and hurt his mother all over again.

In the end, it’s all Izuku can do to force out a white lie through clenched teeth.

“...It’s nothing. Just... wanted to hear your voice.”

It’s fine, he thinks to himself. Izuku has learned that keeping secrets from his mother, even with the intent of protecting her, isn’t always the best course of action. That it isn’t healthy, for either of them. So maybe, maybe when this is all over and they’ve saved Eri, maybe then he can tell her.

Maybe.

“Oh, sweetheart. Well, I’ll see you later. Love you, darling!”

“...Love you too, Mom.”

*

That night, Izuku dreams a familiar nightmare.

He dreams of Icarus, of a boy who tries so desperately to reach the sun. But he’s forgotten that his wings had been strapped onto him by his father (by Daedalus) (by Hisashi) and he’s *burned* for having dared fly high with those wings.

So Icarus (no, Izuku) (no, Icarus) (yes, Izuku) falls, falls, down does he plummet and fall—

His wings burn and his eyes water and wind screams in his ears and

air refuses to let him breathe. And when he turns his head to the side, Izuku finds that he's not the only one who's falling.

Eri falls with him, curled up in a ball, eyes scrunched shut, hands over her ears, mouth pressed into a trembling line.

He knows that pose. It's the stance of someone who knows the inevitability of pain and is resigned to it. Prepared for it.

Oh, *no*.

Izuku tries to reach for her, but she's just out of reach, he calls over the screaming wind for the girl to reach out her hand to him, but Eri doesn't, she doesn't, and Hisashi laughs as both Izuku and Eri *fall*—

—and Izuku wakes with a gasp.

*

When class resumes after the weekend, Class 1-A is abuzz as Uraraka, Asui, and Kirishima's exploits during their internships hit the news.

Izuku grins as he shows Kirishima his phone which has a saved screenshot of the news with the boy's hero name in it.

"You're trending. The incident with Fat Gum blew up, which means *you* blew up—"

Kirishima laughs embarrassedly as he tries to bat away the phone Izuku is shoving into his face.

"Wait, that wording sounds familiar. Is this revenge for when I teased you about that Stain vid going viral? Oh my god, Midoriya, that was *months* ago!"

"I've been told revenge is best served cold," Izuku responds flippantly. "Look, there are some *really* appreciative remarks about your topless hero costume in the comments section—"

"Oh my god, stop it! Someone help!!"

The other guys join in the goodnatured ribbing and teasing so Izuku leaves a pink-faced but laughing Kirishima to congratulate Uraraka

this time.

“I didn’t know you got an intern with Ryukyu! She was one of the top ten heroes last season, and I’ve heard that she’s a great mentor to interns as well—” Izuku cuts himself off when he realizes that he’s starting to ramble again and just gives Uraraka a sheepish smile. “Um. What I meant was, congratulations!”

“Thanks, Deku!” Uraraka beams back at him. But then, her smile falters.

“Are... are you okay, Deku?”

Izuku gives her a puzzled look. “Of course. Why wouldn’t I be?”

Uraraka looks like she might say something but the bell rings before she can. The girl shoots Izuku a look, but in the end, she wordlessly returns to her seat.

*

It doesn’t end there, though.

Iida asks him if he’s alright during lunch, and a few others in Class A also seem to be worried about Izuku by the end of the day. Even Bakugo tosses out a gruff “what the fuck is wrong with you?” which might as well be full-blown mother-henning from anyone else.

He’s fine, Izuku tells everyone.

He doesn’t know why no one seems reassured.

*

“—doriya. Midoriya! What are you doing?!”

Izuku jolts from his wandering thoughts as a panicked voice calls out to him.

“Huh?” he answeres reflexively, only to be snared in the now familiar mind control.

Shinsou releases him from the mind control as soon as he’s caught and repeats the question.

“Again, what are you doing?!”

It looks like he actually wants an answer this time, not just as a way to catch Izuku in his mind control. Izuku looks at him confusedly before a sting in his palm draws his eyes down to his hand.

His left palm is pink with a light first-degree burn.

“Oh,” he says dumbly, and Shinsou smacks him in the forehead.

“*Oh?!* You almost gave me a heart attack!”

Today is one of their weekly quirk training sessions but Izuku hadn’t been able to concentrate that well. And it seems that while his mind wandered, his fire quirk started burning him. Shinsou, true to his promise to be Izuku’s fire extinguisher if Izuku be his guinea pig, had put Izuku under his mind control to cut off his quirk.

“Sorry,” Izuku tries to wave it off, but it looks like Shinsou isn’t buying it.

“It’s been weeks, *months* since you last burned yourself,” Shinsou points out with narrowed eyes. A few weeks ago, Izuku wouldn’t have been able to notice the light of concern in his sharp gaze. “What happened? Are… are you alright?”

Izuku doesn’t know why everyone keeps asking him that.

“I’m fine,” he repeats once again.

He really is.

He doesn’t know why no one believes him.

*

Todoroki is the only one who doesn’t ask questions.

Instead, he knocks on Izuku's bedroom at night and when Izuku opens the door he finds the other boy standing there with a mug of steaming milk in his hand.

Todoroki doesn't ask him what's wrong. He doesn't ask if Izuku's alright. He doesn't ask what happened.

"Try to get some sleep," is all he says as he hands Izuku the mug. As if he knows what the hint of bags starting to form under his eyes means. As if he somehow knows that Izuku's spent sleepless nights as familiar yet new nightmares haunt him.

Todoroki hesitates as if maybe he might say or do something more, but in the end, he just nods at Izuku once and quietly leaves.

Izuku stands in his room, feeling a little lost, holding the mug in his hands.

It's warm.

And when he tentatively brings the drink to his lips, he finds that Todoroki has put exactly the right amount of honey, just the way Izuku likes it.

A lump forms in his throat.

...He's fine, Izuku thinks, blinking back tears. He really is.

Really.

*

The tears eventually spill over a few days later.

Izuku prods his bowl of katsudon slightly absentmindedly during lunch. Iida looks at him for a long moment before putting down his spoon next to his untouched beef stew.

"Midoriya."

"Hm?"

Izuku raises his head to find his friend looking at him with a steady

gaze. But Iida's next words startle him.

"'I'm going to count on you to tell us when you need us. We'll be there.'"

Izuku's eyes widen as the familiar words are thrown in his face. Iida smiles at him and Izuku's eyes catch sight on the light burn scars on Iida's throat that are too faint to notice unless you're looking for them.

"That is what you told me, once, when I was caught up in my own head. The sentiment is true for you as well. If you do not wish to speak of it yet, then you don't have to. But you do not have to pretend nothing is wrong. We are here for you, if and when you need us."

And at that, Izuku is speechless.

Todoroki bumps his shoulder lightly against Izuku's and Uraraka nods in agreement.

Oh, Izuku thinks.

No matter what he's been telling them (what he's been telling *himself*) his friends already knew something had happened. And they respect and trust him enough to let him keep his silence for as long as he needs to.

Tears creep up at the corners of Izuku's eys.

He's so *blessed* to have these people here for him.

And the thing is, he really is fine.

(That's just the problem, isn't it? Izuku is fine. But Eri *isn't.*)

Izuku sniffles and swipes his arm across his eyes. All Might pointed out his tendency to cry too easily, albeit fondly, so he really should get a better handle on his tear glands. And besides, he can't go save Eri with a crying face.

"Thanks, Iida. But I'm really okay. Heroes... don't cry."

"...No, heroes cry too... probably," Todoroki objects even as he pats Izuku's back soothingly. "Here, drink some water."

For once, Izuku doesn't complain that Todoroki's going to spoil him rotten and just accepts the drink with thanks. His friends have already found out that he has something on his mind, so instead of pretending

to be chipper, he might as well just eat up and prepare as much as he can.

"...Would you like some beef stew?" Iida offers after Izuku has finished drinking from Todoroki's cup.

"Yeah."

"Oh! Then have some of my mochi too!"

"Thanks."

But then it kind of spirals out from there. Their classmates that were sitting near them seem to have heard the tail end of their conversation and start flocking to Izuku.

"Oh, is today Feed Midoriya Day? Then here, take this sandwich!"

"Huh? Uh, thanks—"

"And this taco!"

"Um, thank you..."

"Here, you *gotta* try this jello!"

"O, Okay?"

"Someone pass him the kimchi!"

"Quick, eat this too, I stole it from—"

"Hey! Give that back!"

"...Wait. I can't eat all this!"

Class 1-A laugh at the small mountain of food in front of Izuku and Izuku laughs with them, the dark cloud weighing on his heart temporarily lifted.

...Being used to something is a frightening thing.

If you get too used to something bad, you might just give up and never try to get away from it.

If you get too used to something good, though, it will hurt that much

more when it gets taken away from you.

Being used to something is a frightening, terrifying thing.

But, Izuku thinks as he laughs and smiles with his friends, it's worth it. This is worth it.

He hopes Eri will learn this, too.

*

But life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't *kind*.

And so a few days later, Izuku, Kirishima, Uraraka, Asui, and the Big Three are all called to a large-scale hero meeting.

There, they are told about the investigation on the Shie Hassaikai.

There, they are told about the ties of the organization to the quirk-destroying drug.

There, they are told that Eri might be the... *ingredient*.

Their worlds *shatter*.

*

After the meeting, the students of UA gathered together in one of the spare meeting rooms as Togata and Izuku explained how they met Eri and let her go.

Silence curls around their feet as no one really knows what to say.

Uraraka, Kirishima, and Asui finally understand why Izuku had been so off the past few days, Uraraka and Kirishima doubly so as they know a bit about his past and how he must empathize with the girl.

Amajiki and Hado have never seen Togata like this. Togata is

absolutely *devastated*, and it makes Amajiki anxious too.

Eventually, it's Togata who breaks the silence.

"Midoriya."

Izuku looks up to see Togata with his head bowed.

"I'm *so sorry,*" he says to Izuku.

Togata recalls what one of the heroes had said during the debriefing.

"*So if your interns had just rescued the girl when they found her, there wouldn't be a problem in the first place, right?*"

And it's true, Togata thinks. Midoriya wanted to. Tried to. But it was *Togata* that stopped him. *Togata* that let the girl walk back to her personal hell.

"I..." Togata chokes on despair and swallows down his tears. "I'm *so sorry*."

And Izuku realizes that Togata isn't just apologizing to him. He's also apologizing to Eri.

Izuku looks at his senior for a moment. Togata's back is hunched and his head is hanging as if he's physically weighed down by his despair and regret at having stopped Izuku.

Neither of them was right or wrong, Izuku knows. It's more of a difference of opinion than anything. A difference in experience. No matter if he's a senior and one of the Big Three, Togata is still a student, an intern, a child that's used to looking up to adults for guidance. It's only natural for him to have deferred to Sir Nighteye. But Izuku has grown up without any adults to rely on, learnt he had to make all the calls on his own judgment, had to react instantly without having the luxury to step back and plan. And so he wanted to act on the spot, to save Eri as soon as he could.

It's a difference in opinion, in experience, in reaction, in their fundamental belief.

(It's a difference that drove All Might and Sir Nighteye apart in the end.)

And the thing is, neither is right or wrong.

Maybe they could have saved Eri if Izuku had trusted his instincts. Maybe they could have escaped if he'd just taken Eri and *run*. Maybe then the Shie Hassaikai wouldn't have been able to make more drugs. Maybe Eri would be safe.

Or, maybe Chisaki wouldn't have let her go without a fight. Maybe the girl would be too important for him to risk losing. Maybe Izuku and Togata would both be dead for their rushed and unplanned actions. Maybe they would have gotten innocent bystanders hurt too. Maybe Eri would have been hurt and traumatized and worse off than she already is.

It's impossible to tell. Izuku wanted to protect Eri on the spot, and Togata tried to raise the odds by waiting and planning.

They both wanted to save her.

(They both couldn't.)

"...I can't tell you that it's okay," Izuku finally says quietly. He won't patronize Togata or belittle Eri's pain by lying.

But.

"But I *can* tell you that it's not your fault."

Togata lifts his head. He sees no judgment or blame in Izuku's clear green eyes.

"You didn't do anything wrong. You were trying to protect her too. So..."

Izuku holds out a fist.

"This time, let's save her."

Togata sniffles. He wipes away his tears. And then, he raises his own fist and bumps it against Izuku's.

Soon, another fist joins in and bumps theirs.

Izuku looks up to find Kirishima grinning a toothy smile. Following his lead, Uraraka, Asui, Amajiki, and Hado all join in too.

"...Huh," comes a slightly surprised voice, and they all turn to find Aizawa stepping inside.

“Erase... Aizawa-sensei!”

Aizawa eyes their gathered fists. “I was worried that you guys might be down after hearing all that, but I guess you’re alright.”

“Yeah! This is our ‘Let’s definitely save Eri together’ group fist bump!” Kirishima nods vigorously.

The corner of Aizawa’s lips twitches as he approaches them.

“Well, then.”

Aizawa’s fist lands lightly on top of their pile.

The meaning of the simple gesture is clear.

Let’s definitely save Eri together.

Class 1-A beam at their teacher’s participation.

“Oh, and Midoriya?”

“Yes, Sensei?”

“Don’t worry too much about calling me Sensei. You can all call me Eraserhead outside of school.”

*

“...So that’s why Midoriya has been so down lately,” Iida mumbles, eyes downcast and his wide shoulders drooped.

Bakugo doesn’t say anything, but Shouto’s eyes catch the way his fists are clenched tight. However dysfunctional their relationship may be, Bakugo Katsuki is still Midoriya Izuku’s childhood friend, after all. And Shouto doesn’t know how much history they actually share but, judging by Bakugo’s reactions, the truth of Midoriya’s past seems to be as new to him as it is to the rest of them.

After coming back from the debriefing, Uraraka and Kirishima had told Bakugo, Iida, and Shouto a little about the situation. Not anything concrete, since it’s all classified, but they did let the three know that Izuku had to watch a girl who’d been abused return to her abuser

without being able to save her.

The five of them are the only ones in Class 1-A who were there for Shigaraki's video call while Midoriya was kidnapped. In other words, they're the only ones in class who know just how difficult and just how *personal* it must have been for Midoriya to watch that.

Shouto rubs the back of his neck. It makes sense, now, both why Midoriya has been so off and why he couldn't say anything. He's glad more than ever that he'd trusted Midoriya to talk to him if and when he needed to and hadn't asked any questions. Midoriya wouldn't have been able to say much what with the tight lock on the classified information, and Shouto doesn't want to back Midoriya into a corner by pressing for answers he cannot give.

The five of them are silent for a moment as they think of what Midoriya must be going through.

"Both me and Kirishima will be going on the mission with him, so we'll keep an eye on him," Uraraka promises eventually.

Before anyone else can respond to that, Bakugo scoffs.

"What the fuck. Deku doesn't need you losers looking after him. He'll be fine."

And a few weeks ago, they might have bristled at his sharp words and seemingly dismissive attitude. But, thanks to Midoriya, they (or at the very least, Uraraka and Kirishima) have become better at translating what some of Class 1-A has dubbed 'Bakugo-speech'.

They know that what Bakugo really means is that Midoriya is strong enough to overcome this on his own.

That it means Bakugo believes in the strength of his childhood friend.

That in truth, Bakugo has faith in Midoriya.

Kirishima's lips spread into a toothy grin.

"You're right! Midoriya's one of the manliest guys I know! He'll be fine even without us, but we'll still support him!"

Bakugo just gives a *hmph* at Kirishima's thumbs-up, but he doesn't say anything else. Iida seems torn between wanting to thank Uraraka and Kirishima for letting them know and scolding them for even vaguely

leaking confidential information. Shouto...

Shouto wishes fiercely that he didn't fail his Provisional License Exam so he could stand next to Midoriya instead of having to be left behind and left in the dark.

But it's too late for regret, so Shouto just unclenches his hands and resolves to do what he can.

Later that night Shouto goes to the kitchen with the intent of making another cup of warm milk to bring Midoriya. He understands now why the other boy has been losing sleep, but he still hopes to ease the strain however much or little as he can. It's the least he can do, seeing as he can't go with Midoriya.

But when he enters the kitchen, he finds that someone else is already there.

"...Midoriya?"

The boy turns around at Shouto's voice.

"Oh. Hey, Todoroki!"

Shouto feels his lips curve and his eyes soften on reflex at Midoriya's bright greeting.

"What are you doing here?"

Just as he asks, he sees that Midoriya has a carton of milk, honey, and a mug out on the counter. Midoriya scratches his cheek with a sheepish grin.

"Well, you're always looking after me, so I thought I'd return the favour and surprise you this time. But it seems I was a bit too late," he says, and Shouto takes another look at the counter.

Oh. *Two* mugs.

A flash of warmth swirls in Shouto's stomach as if he already downed a glass of warm milk. He feels his smile widen more than he'd have thought possible just a few months ago.

"It's not too late," Shouto denies, but Midoriya gives him a look, and — is that a *pout?*

"I wanted it to be a surprise," Midoriya grouses, but soon smiles easily

and offers Shouto a steaming mug. “Join me?”

“Of course.”

It’s just like Midoriya to try to look after Shouto even while he himself is under so much strain. It makes a wave of affection and exasperation rush over Shouto, especially after hearing what happened from Uraraka and Kirishima.

Shouto brings the mug to his lips to hide a smile.

Bakugo is right.

Midoriya will be fine.

*

But Eri *isn’t*.

The girl trembles as yet another ‘babysitter’ is *unmade* in front of her eyes. A splatter of blood lands at her feet and the girl scrambles to scoot further away, but it’s too late. Blood stains her bandages and seeps across the fabric as if it’s a hand wrapping around her ankle.

Your fault, the creeping bloodstain whispers. *Your fault.*

I’m sorry, she wants to sob, but Eri keeps her lips pressed tight with practiced familiarity. This is not the first time, after all. Not the first time someone was disassembled because of her. Not the first time she was a bad girl. Not the first time it was her fault. (*It’s always her fault.*)

Chisaki lets out a long breath. His hands lower slowly before his eyes drift to Eri.

“Eri.”

She *flinches* at her name as if he’d slapped her. Not that he ever has—Chisaki only ever touches her to unmake and remake her—but his cold gaze makes her tremble.

“I get the last time,” Chisaki says almost conversationally as he pulls his glove back on one hand even as he leaves the other still bare. A reminder, a threat. “The fool watching you took his eyes off while you

were outside. It was all but an invitation for you to try to run."

Not that it ever would have been successful. Chisaki himself had gone after Eri within moments of her ridiculously lucky escape. Few things rate high enough for the young boss of the Shie Hassaikai to take into his own hands. Eri counts as one of them.

"But this time. This time, it wasn't even like that. You weren't just presented with an opportunity, you actively tried to make one, actively tried to escape. ...This is the first time. Why?"

Eri trembles as Chisaki's eyes bore into her. But her mouth remains firmly closed.

Even so, Chisaki somehow seems to read something from her silence. He cocks his head at her as if evaluating her. Studying her.

"What was different this time?" he muses, dispassionate and detached as if she's merely a speck on a petri dish. "Or is the question... who?"

Eri can't help but tense. It's enough of a giveaway for Chisaki to connect all the dots.

Oh *no*.

"That hero in training you met when you first escaped. He's why you tried to escape. Because of him," Chisaki deduces in a flat voice, and Eri feels despair creeping up her entire body.

Chisaki is going to hurt *that person* because of Eri. Just because she wanted to see him again. It's her fault. Again.

I'm sorry, Eri sobs in her head again even as her well-trained body keeps silence. *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.*

"That won't do," Chisaki clicks his tongue irritably. "There's too much at risk already to deal with your disobedience."

And with that, the man reaches out his bare hand. *Punishment.* Eri knows that there's no use in trying to run or scream but she can't help her instinct to scrunch her eyes shut and raise her arms in helpless defence against the pain—

—that never comes.

Eri tentatively cracks open an eye. Chisaki has taken his cold eyes off of her and is staring up at the ceiling. Muffled noises are coming

through as if people are running and shouting upstairs.

“They’re here,” Chisaki narrows his eyes. He withdraws his hand from Eri but the girl doesn’t dare breathe easily yet.

“Chrono,” Chisaki calls while he motions to Eri. Chrono steps forward towards Eri at the order, and again, Eri knows better than to run, so she only meekly curls into herself as she is picked up and carried like cargo as the two men set off through the underground passageway.

It’s not long before they’re interrupted.

“I’m sorry, but... I’d like a word,” the person pants, breath heavy from running and cape billowing at his back. Eri recognizes him as the other hero who was with *that person.*

“You,” Chisaki’s brows crease almost imperceptively, also recognizing the caped person. “Not turning a blind eye this time?”

The person flinches as if he’s been struck, but he grits his teeth and charges. Chisaki’s henchmen gang up on him but the person easily evades them and takes Eri from Chrono’s grasp.

“Why...?” she can’t help but speak up for the first time. “You can’t...! He’ll murder you!” You too. And it will be because of her. *Her fault, her fault, her fault.*

“Come back, Eri,” Chisaki tells her as if he reads her mind, “or he’ll be murdered too. How many times must I tell you?” And his words wrap around Eri’s limbs and creep around her heart. “You destroy people. That’s how you were born. Every move you make kills people. Your very existence is cursed.” *Your fault, your fault, your fault.*

Eri knows. She knows. So she tries to push away and run back to Chisaki, just like she did for *that person.*

But unlike when he watched her leave last time, this time, this person embraces her in a hold that’s infinitely warmer than when Chrono held her.

“It’s alright,” he tells her.

“I will be your hero!” he declares.

Lemillion, he says his name is. He wraps his cape around Eri. He punches Chisaki in the face. He doesn’t let anyone come near her. He’s

so overwhelmingly strong.

Tentative hope blossoms like a flower peeking out of a drift of snow to raise its face to the sun.

But then it withers to dust.

Eri watches as Lemillion takes the shot aimed at her. She watches as her own blood destroys his quirk. She watches as he still stands to defend her even quirkless and wounded.

Eri hadn't cried even when she was hurt. But tears spill over as blood flows down Lemillion's body.

Her fault, they sing as tears and blood splatter on the ground. *Her fault, her fault, her fault.*

I'm so, so sorry.

*

"Go ahead, Deku!" Uraraka had said when she and Ryukyu's office held back the goons at the front gate to let the others pass.

"Midoriya, go!" Kirishima had shouted when he and Fat Gum pushed Izuku and Aizawa out of the way and got separated from the group instead.

Izuku isn't dumb. On the contrary, his analytic skills are one of the few things he readily prides himself on. He knows why they singled him out, why they wanted him specifically to go forward out of all the other interns, police, and even pro heroes. They know his past and connection to Eri. They know just how desperate he is. They know just how *personal* this is.

Izuku never wished for his friends to know about his past. Never wanted to burden them with baggage like that. But he will forever be grateful for their understanding and support. Izuku knows that having people who care for you this much isn't granted in life, and he cherishes it with all he has.

He hopes Eri will come to know what it feels like too. He'll *make sure* she learns what it feels like.

With Ryukyu's office holding the front gates, Togata running off ahead, and Amajiki, Kirishima, and Fat Gum staying behind to hold off other members, the only ones left in the group are Izuku, Aizawa, Sir Nighteye, Rock Lock, and some of the police.

The walls around them shift again and the police call out a warning.

"Watch out! Irinaka must be here again!"

While Izuku has already fought villains before on multiple occasions, this is the first time he's been on an official mission. One of the things he appreciates most is the extensive intel gathering and support from various heroes and the police. Just knowing what kind of quirk his opponent has is a huge advantage.

So when Irinaka warps the walls and floor again, Izuku is ready. He makes sure his repaired mask is firmly over his mouth and *pulls* the first person he sees so that they're not separated by themselves. The person turns out to be Sir Nighteye, who twists his body with surprising agility so that he slides across the floor to stand by Izuku's side.

The walls slam shut around them, sectioning them off from the other heroes.

Nighteye looks around them while Izuku pushes out the recoil of his pull. He breathes out fire into his mask to negate the backlash. Hatsume had reassured him the mask was more fire and heat resistant than ever and true to her words he feels the flames flicker against his lips as they curl back from the mask.

He coughs out some stray flames as Nighteye raps his knuckles on a wall.

"The walls aren't that thick. I can still hear the others. But then what was the point of trying to separate us now?" the hero muses, brows furrowed and eyes narrowed.

"I'm not sure," Izuku responds. "Maybe they're getting desperate? Either way, I can try to break the walls—"

The sound of yelling and gunfire pierces the air. Izuku doesn't even bother finishing his question and just charges at the wall the sound came from, Full Cowl flickering like electricity in his veins as he kicks the wall down to find the police fighting against a hulking man with a plague mask and—

“Twice?!” Izuku sputters.

The villain turns at Izuku’s voice.

“Huh?! Why are you here?! Who are you again?”

His characteristic conflicting speech aside, the villain soon flings his hands up in a dramatic pose and shouts to the Yakuza beside him.

“Whatever! Go get ‘em, Rappa bro!”

The large man leaps towards the police with them with a roar. The police have their guns out but the man is too fast.

Fortunately, Izuku’s quirk doesn’t need to be as precise as bullets.

He *pulls* at the man and manages to change his course. The man misses the police and skids across the floor. Izuku breathes fire into his mask, not willing to risk pushing out fire in a confined space with this many people, and Sir Nighteye seamlessly takes over as he flicks a support weapon in the shape of a seal at Rappa.

Izuku is about to continue and assist Nighteye when he catches movement from the side.

From everything Izuku has seen during his time with the League, Twice is a physical fighter. If he even fights at all, that is. But now, he’s holding up a gun.

And it’s pointed straight at Sir Nighteye.

“Sir!”

Izuku can only pull one thing at a time. If he lets go of Rappa, the man could continue to target the police. But if he doesn’t do anything, then Nighteye will get shot.

There’s really only one thing he can do.

He steps between them.

Bam!

“Midoriya!” Sir Nighteye calls his name in alarm.

“I’m okay,” Izuku shouts back, and he really is. Maybe the bullet only grazed him? But what matters right now is that he’s still in fighting

condition, so with Rappa already subdued by Sir Nighteye and melting down (another clone?) Izuku thrusts out a hand towards Twice and *pushes*—

—but nothing happens.

"What...?"

Izuku stares down at his hand in disbelief. Then a thought enters his mind like a strike of lightning as he casts his eyes around wildly, looking for the bullet that hit him.

There, rolling on the floor, is the husk of the bullet that must have hit him. And it looks exactly like the quirk destroying bullets they'd seen at the debriefing.

Oh.

"Uh-oh," Twice scratches the back of his head. "I was aiming at the salaryman, but... huh. Well, sadly we were only allowed to play with the unfinished product, so unfortunately your quirk will return in a few days. Don't worry!"

Izuku just stares at the casual thumbs up Twice is giving him.

Because you see, no matter how much he's grown in the past months, no matter if Todoroki helped him see that it's his power, Izuku has spent most of his life thinking that half his quirk was stained by his father.

For so much of his life, Izuku had desperately wished he didn't have his father's quirk.

He never thought he'd get his wish like this.

"But wait, this is actually great!" Twice keeps on blathering, perking up from his previously sheepish demeanour. "If you can't use your quirk, then it'll be easier to—!"

That's as far as he gets before he barely dodges the kick to his face. Twice yelps as he scrambles back. Even the mask over his face can't hide the way his mouth is gaping at the sight of Izuku crackling with Full Cowl.

"What?! How?! What the... damn it, you useless Yakuza! You can't even make a proper drug?!"

Irinaka slams another wall to section Twice off from the heroes but the villain's wailing complaints can still be heard for a while.

"Midoriya!"

Sir Nighteye approaches Izuku with sharp eyes.

"Your condition?" he asks without beating around the bush.

Izuku looks down at his hand. He tries to push out a bit of fire, but it still won't happen.

"...The drug worked," he bites out, still conflicted on how to feel. Sure, he's now accepted that it's his power, but... but.

He tries to shake it off and focus on the current situation.

"I can still use..." he makes sure that the police can't hear him and lowers his voice, "I can still use One For All, though. All Might mentioned that it's a quirk that can be forcefully given but not forcefully taken. Maybe that's why?"

Nighteye inclines his head.

"Whatever the reason, what matters now is whether you can still fight."

The hero looks straight at him.

"Can you?"

Izuku straightens.

"Yes, Sir."

Nighteye looks at him for a moment more and Izuku fears that he'll be sent away, that he won't be able to help, that he won't get a chance to save Eri ever again— but the hero soon nods.

"Alright then. We'll tell the others that the drug seems to be faulty and only partially erased your quirk."

Izuku breathes out a breath of relief.

"Sir Nighteye," he calls before the hero turns away from him. "There's something Twice said that bothers me. When he shot the drug at me, he said he was only allowed to use the unfinished version so my quirk

will heal in a few days. But then..."

Nighteye's eyes are wide behind his glasses as he too catches onto what Izuku is saying.

"Does that imply that there's a finalized version that completely erases quirks?"

*

"Sensei!"

Aizawa turns at Midoriya's voice to see the boy stepping out from behind a crumbled wall.

"Thank goodness I found you," the boy breathes a sigh of relief. "Sir Nighteye and the others are nearby, but you were the only one we couldn't find. Are you alright?"

"...Yeah," Aizawa replies after a beat. "And you?"

The boy hesitates.

"Twice is here, and he... I'm sorry, I messed up, he shot me with that drug that erases quirks."

His green eyes stand out in stark contrast against how his face has paled in the dim light.

"Sir Nighteye keeps telling me to fall back, but..."

Aizawa blinks slowly, then approaches him.

"It's too dangerous for you to go back on your own. I'll escort you there."

"Really?" The boy's face brightens. "Then thanks for— wah!"

Midoriya scrambles back as he just barely dodges the capture weapon Aizawa flings at him as soon as he'd approached close enough.

"I thought you were going to escort me, Sensei!" the boy calls in mild panic.

“I will,” Aizawa retorts with gritted teeth, “to prison.”

At that, ‘Midoriya’ clicks his tongue. His expression distorts into an irritated pout that looks so out of place on Midoriya’s face.

“It’s no fun~ How come you can tell every time?!” Midoriya complains.

Or rather, Toga Himiko.

Because you see, ever since Aizawa told Midoriya he could call him by his hero name, the boy had done so almost giddily. Not once has Midoriya called Aizawa anything but Eraserhead while they were on this mission.

While Aizawa allowed Midoriya to call him by his hero name partly to help put the boy at ease, part of it was also as a precaution. Even if they know that Aizawa is the one who arrested Salamandar all those years ago, no one in the League knows about Midoriya’s more... personal attachment (or hero-worship) (or awe) (or reverence) (not that Aizawa would ever admit those words) to Eraserhead, so no one would think of this little detail.

It’s not failproof, not by a long shot, but it’s enough to give them an edge when facing Toga’s deception.

Aizawa’s eyes flash red and Midoriya’s guise melts off Toga Himiko. This stunt is getting old fast, and he never wants to see the villain casually walking around in his problem child’s face ever again.

He throws his capture weapon around her but she uses the hold he has on her to dash closer instead, her hand brandishing a knife. Aizawa dodges the knife— or so he thought until the girl flips over his head and shoves it into his shoulder.

“—!”

Aizawa bites back a grunt as he pivots around to face the girl again. His abrupt motion has shaken her off, the knife clattering to the ground between them with a splatter of blood.

“Uh oh!” Toga laments at the dropped blade, reaching out for it despite herself, and only barely jumps out of the way from Aizawa’s capture weapon. The walls move to slam shut around her, protecting her, and Aizawa grits his teeth at the proof that the League is working together with the Yakuza.

As much as he wants to put Toga behind bars, it'd be no use chasing after her when Irinaka is protecting her, especially when he's been wounded. And...

Aizawa stoops to pick up the bloodied knife.

Toga had acted as if she was upset that she wasn't able to retrieve the weapon that's been coated with his blood. And judging from the fact that she came to him during the Provisional License Exam...

Someone breaks through a wall with a smash before he can finish the thought.

"Eraserhead!" a panicked voice calls out.

"I'm here, Midoriya," Aizawa responds immediately.

Midoriya and Sir Nighteye emerge from another room. Aizawa spots the police supporting an injured Rock Lock from behind the broken wall before Midoriya rushes up to him.

"You're bleeding! What happened? Are you alright? Are—"

Aizawa plops a hand on top of Midoriya's head and the boy stills immediately.

"I'm fine," he sighs. "But Toga Himiko was here, and it looks like she's working with the Yakuza."

Nighteye nods.

"Twice was here as well. He ran off as soon as he lost the advantage, though, so we don't know what they're after."

"I might have an answer to that."

Aizawa holds up the knife.

"I think they're after my blood."

Midoriya pales at Aizawa's words.

"The License Exam," he puts together quickly. "We thought she might have come because of me, but they must have been after you even then! But... why?"

That's the real question, isn't it?

“We can worry about that later,” Aizawa shakes his head after a moment. “Right now, the most important thing is rescuing Eri. Though we should be careful we’re not fooled by Toga. Be wary; she even claimed she got shot by the quirk erasing drug to cover for the fact that she can’t use the quirk of the person she turns into.”

At his words, Nighteye looks over at Midoriya.

Aizawa’s brow ticks.

“Oh, um,” Midoriya meekly holds up one hand as if he’s in class or something. “I, uh, actually did get hit by the drug.”

Aizawa stares.

“Prove that you’re really Midoriya.”

Because while Midoriya calling him Sensei while in uniform is a sure sign that he’s fake, just because he did call him Eraserhead doesn’t guarantee he’s real.

“Uh,” Midoriya blinks at the sudden request. He fingers his mask, lowered to rest on his collar, and starts mumbling to himself on what can prove his identity.

At this point he’s either the real thing or a very convincing actor.

Aizawa’s just about to say he’s seen enough when Midoriya perks up with a bright expression.

“Oh! Here’s something Toga wouldn’t know! I carried you back to school bridal-style after the practical exam last semester!”

A half-cough, half-choking noise sounds from among the police. Nighteye just raises one unimpressed eyebrow. If Aizawa had been drinking, he would have spat it out.

Really. It had to be *that?*

Despite the dire situation, Aizawa groans as he’s reminded of the incident again. (Yamada had been hysterical. There had been pictures. *So many* pictures.)

“Alright,” he sighs. “If you really don’t have a quirk, then you’re going to have to either go back or stay with the police.”

And where the Midoriya impersonated by Toga had been all too ready

to leave (probably as a plot to lure Aizawa further away from the other heroes) the real Midoriya balks and his eyes widen with alarm.

“Wha— no! My quirk was only partially erased! Eraserhead, please, I can still fight! I *have* to!”

While Aizawa understands Midoriya’s desperation, he won’t gamble with his problem child’s life. But before he can order the boy back, someone else interjects.

And it’s none other than Sir Nighteye.

“He’s right,” the hero nods. “Rock Lock was too heavily injured by another clone of Rappa to keep going. With him down, you and I are the only heroes left. Not to mention you’re injured. The police say they’re going after the League, so we need Midoriya with us.”

Aizawa feels ready to snap.

“What are you saying?!” he almost snarls. “We can’t just lead him to danger when he’s helpless!”

But despite how he initially thought Nighteye might agree on sending Midoriya back, he’s unmoving in his stance.

“It would be a greater risk for him to try to go after the League with the police, or even to try to go back alone. It would be better for him to stay with us where we can keep an eye on him. And besides. He’s far from helpless.”

After all, Sir Nighteye knows better than most just how powerful One For All is. Even if Midoriya can’t use it to the extent of All Might, he’s *far* from helpless.

(And as much as Aizawa is desperate to protect his student, Nighteye is just as desperate to protect *his*. If Midoriya is right and there’s a finished product of the drug, then Mirio is in grave danger. Mirio needs all the help possible, and Nighteye won’t refuse any volunteers. Even if it’s a student intern. Even if it’s someone he wants to hate.)

Some part of Aizawa acknowledges the logic in Nighteye’s reasoning but he’s still about to argue when another voice quietly calls him.

“Eraserhead.”

Midoriya is looking up at him with calm green eyes. He isn’t being

reckless, he isn't being emotional, and that's what halts the worry on the tip of Aizawa's tongue.

"I understand your lesson now," Midoriya says quietly. "I thought I knew what you meant when you said you have to save yourself first if you want to save others. And now, I *understand*."

Midoriya looks up at him imploringly.

"I promise I'll be careful. But you need me. *Eri* needs me. So please, Eraserhead. Let me fight with you."

Aizawa closes his eyes for a brief moment.

When he reopens them, he does so with hard eyes and a closed hand.

"Promise," he says gruffly as he holds Midoriya to his words, and the boy smiles gratefully at him as he raises his own fist to give Aizawa's waiting hand a fist bump.

It means the same thing as before.

Let's definitely save Eri together.

*

But by the time they've dealt with Irinaka and finally caught up to Chisaki, Nighteye's worst fears are sprawled out in front of them.

Mirio stands, just barely, teetering in exhaustion and pain. He's bloody and battered and almost broken, but he's still holding between Eri and everything that wants to harm her.

Nighteye's heart lurches and his hands tremble at the sight.

He lets Midoriya and Aizawa distract Chisaki as he runs up to Mirio and Eri.

"Be— behind me," Mirio gasps. Even in his state, his first concern is the girl behind him.

Nighteye could have said a number of things in response. He could have apologized for sending a mere student intern alone to face the

boss of the Yakuza. He could have mourned that he couldn't come sooner. He could have wept for his student's wounds.

But he doesn't.

Nighteye may have acted purposefully cold and brusque towards Midoriya but at heart he's a caring, loving, *good* mentor.

So instead of retracting the faith he'd given by saying Mirio shouldn't have come, instead of soiling Eri's rescue by lamenting Mirio's pain, instead of tarnishing Mirio's efforts by making it something that needs to be apologized for, Nighteye pulls the boy (*his* boy, *his* student) into a gentle embrace.

"Incredible," he praises as he swallows his tears. Nighteye's seen the three other members of the Yakuza besides Chisaki that Mirio must have taken down alone. To come so far... "You... are incredible... Mirio!"

And Mirio's knees buckle in relief at his mentor's words. He'd had to hold himself so strong for so long, but here in his mentor's arms, he can finally rest for even a moment.

"Midoriya!" Nighteye calls. "Take Mirio and Eri to safety!"

Izuku disengages Chisaki and comes running, sparking with Full Cowl at Nighteye's call.

"Eraserhead is down!" he reports, eyes blown wide and heart pumping. "He's not wounded, but he's been slowed down by a villain's quirk!"

"I'll handle it," Nighteye nods. "Just take them and go!"

Izuku does.

"Eri! Togata Senpai! Hold on for a bit more," Izuku pleads, knowing how cruel his request is. Mirio has already held on far past his limit, but he needs to hold on just a little bit longer.

Izuku smashes through the wall that covered the entrance they came from. He thanks whatever higher forces there are that it had been his original quirk that was erased and not One For All. Fighting without his full quirk feels like he has one hand tied behind his back, like he's constantly overreaching, but at the very least One For All lets him hold both Eri and Mirio and open the path for them. He picks up both

Eri and Mirio's significantly larger bulk with ease, setting them down as gently as he can on the other side of the demolished wall.

But before he pulls away, Eri tightens the hold she has on his hero uniform.

"You've done enough," she says in a whisper that's nearly a sob. "I'm so sorry."

And, oh.

Oh, Eri.

A lump forms in Izuku throat.

No one should ever need to apologize for being saved. *Especially* not a child.

There are so many things Izuku wants to say, so many things he wants to tell her, but there simply isn't enough time right now. As much as he wants to hold her and never let go, lives are at stake so Izuku forces himself to let go of her and turns to Mirio.

"This is the way out," he tells Mirio as he points to the corridor they came from. "I— I know Sir Nighteye told me to take you to safety, but Eraserhead is down and I'm worried about Sir facing Chisaki alone, so —"

"Go," Mirio gasps, stopping his babbling, understanding where Izuku is going with this. "Go help Sir."

Izuku nods. He lights up with Full Cowl again and vanishes through the hole.

Mirio is left with Eri again. He forces his shaking limbs to move, taking her hand and leading her one excruciating step after the other, but he can't keep it up for long. Mirio has already pushed past his limit, further and beyond. He had desperately kept standing for Eri's sake, but now that he's seen the other heroes arrive, relief and exhaustion makes his knees shake and buckle.

Mirio finally collapses to the floor, gasping for breath, cold sweat and tears rolling down his face.

He can't do this anymore.

"Eri...! Go... hide... and wait for reinforcements! Dozens... of people...

are here, just to rescue you...!"

But Eri stands there silently, watching her self proclaimed hero coming apart at the seams with far too familiar eyes.

"Eri... you'll be alright," Mirio pants. "You... will be alright."

But those words fail to comfort Eri like Mirio probably wanted.

Because that has never been what Eri wanted to hear.

And at that moment, a voice as familiar as the darkness behind her eyelids rings loudly through the ruins.

"Another person will die because of you!" Chisaki's voice pierces through the air and Eri's heart. "Is that what you want? Eri!"

No. No it isn't.

So Eri lets go of Mirio's hand and willingly runs back to Chisaki.

"I don't want that...!" she calls out desperately as she exposes herself.

And— oh.

When she returns to the room, she sees blood splattered everywhere. Aizawa has been whisked away when Chisaki fused himself with his subordinate and reassembled the room, but Sir Nighteye is a bloody mess on the floor with Izuku standing between him and Chisaki, not much better off himself.

"*Eri*," Izuku breathes, the note of his voice a lamentation, a plea, because he knows exactly why she came back. He *understands* why she came back. And his heart *breaks* for her.

Nighteye, pierced with spikes and on the verge of losing consciousness, hears the panic in Izuku's voice and sees that Mirio isn't with Eri. He usually tries to avoid 'seeing' others' futures, but in this desperate moment he needs something to cling to, he needs assurance that Mirio is fine, that Izuku won't die trying to protect him, that Eri will be saved, he prays for a hopeful future and he *sees*, and—

—Oh.

...Life isn't fair.

And it certainly isn't kind.

Nighteye closes his eyes.

“You’ve only made it worse,” Chisaki tells Izuku. “I admit, Lemillion was stronger than me. But because he stood his ground and delayed me, now all of you will die. It’s the same for you. With your speed, you could have escaped. But because you tried to protect Nighteye, you will die. And as for Eri…”

Chisaki’s cold eyes bore into the small girl as he addresses her.

“Do you think he’ll be able to somehow win this situation alone?”

Eri trembles under the weight of his gaze.

“I don’t.”

“Then what should you do?”

“I’ll go back to you,” Eri whispers, like someone who’s too used to despair and resignation. “So instead, please fix them…!”

“Very good,” Chisaki praises hollowly as if talking not to a human being but a well-trained dog. “But this has all been far too much of a hassle. You’re going to have to learn your lesson.”

And before Izuku’s tired and distracted body can react, Chisaki is on him, raising a hand to clutch his throat.

“Three times, Eri,” Chisaki hisses as Izuku chokes and claws at his arm. “You defied me three times. Once when you tried to escape with this boy. The second time when you tried to go and find him earlier today. And the third time just now when you left with Lemillion. So as punishment, you will watch him die three times.”

“No, please, I’m sorry, *no—!*” Eri screams as Chisaki activates his quirk.

And Izuku is *unmade.*

Again.

And again.

Izuku is familiar with violence. He’s known it before he even learned to write his own name, before he even learned right from wrong.

But this...

This is the first time he's faced with *torture.*

There's barely enough time for thought between every time Chisaki disassembles and reassembles him, let alone enough time to scream. He's killed and revived thrice in the span of moments, reduced to puddles and scraped together again, too quick to stop, too powerful to escape. The sound of Eri's wails mix with the memory of Inko's screams, and Hisashi laughs and croons in his ear, and he's dead and killed and murdered—

When Chisaki finally releases Izuku he's dropped to the floor in a trembling mess. Eri runs up to him with tears streaming down her face.

"I'm sorry," she sobs as she clings to him. "I'm so, so sorry."

Her fault, her fault, her fault.

Chisaki looks down on them with disinterest.

"I've reassembled him, so he's physically fine, just like you asked. But his body has gone through too much pain and trauma in such a short span of time that he won't be able to move or even think straight," he informs Eri. The girl only cries, clutching Izuku's still form.

Normally, Chisaki would have been right. All of the people he's done this to in the past had been a misfunctioning mess by the time Chisaki was through with them.

But if there's something Chisaki miscalculated, it's that Izuku isn't normal. He's used to bearing pain. Good at it, even.

It's one of the few lessons Hisashi ever taught him.

And Izuku has always been a fast learner.

Lulled by the knowledge that Izuku shouldn't be able to move, Chisaki is taken completely off guard when Izuku bursts into action. Being reassembled had *hurt* but it had also healed all of Izuku's wounds and returned his strength.

Izuku's hand shoots out and grasps Chisaki's collar. The man is caught completely unaware as Izuku charges up with One For All and delivers a punch straight to his face.

The villain is sent flying across the room with a crash.

But Izuku doesn't linger on him for long. Instead, he turns immediately to Eri and hugs her *tight.*

"I'm so sorr—" she starts to say, but Izuku cuts her off before she can finish.

'I'm so sorry' is exactly what he wants to say. He wants to say *I'm so sorry you had to see that*, he wants to tell her *I'm so sorry I made you feel like you have to protect me*, *I'm so sorry I made you cry for me.*

But Izuku knows better than anyone how much those words can hurt. How they aren't what Eri needs to hear. So he doesn't say them.

"Thank you," he breathes instead, and he feels a surprised jolt go through Eri's small body, as if she never expected to hear words of gratitude, as if she's never been thanked before. "You were so brave," he praises. "Thanks to you, I'm alright. You saved me. ...Now, let *me* save *you.*"

And at those words, fresh tears well up in Eri's eyes.

You'll be alright, Mirio had said, with an implied *even if I'm not.* And Eri had let go of his hand because that had never been what she wanted.

But *thank you*, Izuku said instead. *You saved me. Now, let me save you.*

***We'll** be alright*, he's promising. Not just Eri, but both of them. *All* of them.

Being used to something is a frightening thing.

Eri was too used to Chisaki, to pain, to despair, to resignation for her to dare hope that the heroes could win. She was too used to being faulted for death to stand by and watch. Most of all, she was too kind to accept Mirio's sacrifice.

But Izuku assured Eri that he was alright. That she *saved* him. And that if she lets him save her, that *they* will be alright.

That is what finally makes Eri lift her arms to tentatively wrap around Izuku's neck and hug him back.

That is what finally gives her the resolve to *be* saved.

You saved me, her hero had said. *Now, let me save you.*

“Okay,” she whispers.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku Headbang

Welcome Home

Chapter Notes

> Thank you, as always, for your wonderful art!
> Casual wear Izuku by deyunn:
> https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/189698657169

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku used to dream about Icarus.

He still dreams about Icarus.

He dreams of a boy whose father forcefully strapped wings of feathers and wax to his back. He dreams of a boy who desperately tries to reach the sun.

He dreams of falling from the sky with burning wings.

See, from the day he first manifested his quirk to just a few months ago, Izuku had absolutely *hated* his quirk. The first time he used his quirk it burned him, it made his mother scream, it made Hisashi laugh and croon "*Like father, like son.*"

He wished he was rather quirkless.

But Fate must have a cruel sense of humour for when that wish finally came true, it was only after Izuku met Todoroki and accepted his quirk as his own. It was only after he'd come to rely and depend on its power. It was only after he met Eri and saw too much of himself reflected in her.

And then his quirk was erased by Eri's.

For so much of his life, Izuku had desperately wished he didn't have his father's quirk.

He never thought he'd get his wish like this.

But then again, of course it would be here and now.

Because life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind.

*

Rubble tumbles to the ground as Chisaki claws his way out of the crevice Izuku had pummeled him into.

“Saving each other?” the man spits, a vein throbbing at his temple. “Don’t make me laugh. I don’t know how you’re able to move after dying so many times, but all that trauma wouldn’t have gone anywhere. You won’t last long. You’re straining past your limit.”

He’s right. While Izuku’s unusually high pain tolerance allows him to keep hold of his consciousness and move, that doesn’t mean his body isn’t *screaming* from the phantom pain of being splattered across the ground and scraped together again. But even if he is straining past his limit, Izuku won’t, can’t back down. Not when Eri finally reached back for him, not when she finally resolved to be saved, not when the sliver of hope Togata sparked has been finally breathed to life.

Plus Ultra, after all.

“This is exactly what I’m talking about,” the man continues. “If you had stayed down, you wouldn’t have to suffer anymore. But because you stood up again, because you think you can do something just because you have a quirk, you’re just going to make it worse for everyone. It’s an *infection*.”

Chisaki is all but snarling in disgust but Izuku hardly even listens to him as he eases Eri into a better position to hold. Unlike Kota or Hayato, the other children Izuku had to protect while fighting, Eri can’t hang onto his back. Malnutrition and lack of exercise have made her frail and Izuku can feel how her thin arms tremble around his shoulders. She wouldn’t be able to hang onto him on her own. So instead, Izuku is going to have to hold her while fighting.

He shifts Eri so that the girl is tucked to one side of his chest, using his left arm to cradle her close and shield her so that at least his right arm can be freed up in case of emergencies. He can’t let go of Eri since she’s Chisaki’s primary target. He’s sure that the Yakuza will go after her the moment he sets her down. So he’ll have to fight while holding her in his arms, even if it hinders his movement.

It’s not an ideal position, but then again, nothing about this is ideal.

Unlike Chisaki, whose only goal is to escape with Eri, Izuku has so

many things to consider. Not only does he have to protect Eri from Chisaki, but he also has to protect Sir Nighteye too, not to mention find Aizawa and make sure Togata is safe, and what about Kirishima and Amajiki and everyone else who stayed behind and—

Izuku's mind is in overdrive, running through all the possibilities, calculating his rate of success.

The original plan had been for Eraserhead to erase Chisaki's quirk while Sir Nighteye and Izuku incapacitated him. But their foe must have seen through their plan because the first thing Chisaki did was to bring Aizawa down and isolate him away from them. Now, with Aizawa gone and Nighteye critically wounded, Izuku, a mere intern, a *high school student*, is the only person left to fight the Yakuza boss.

Izuku counts his options as he tightens his hold on Eri.

He could stall for time and wait for reinforcements to arrive, like his original plan when facing Stain. Ryukyu's entire agency, along with Uraraka and Asui, had stayed behind by the gates to take care of the lackeys there. They, along with the majority of the police, were to join them once they're done and might be headed here now. But the problem with this plan is that there's no way to know when they'll arrive, not to mention it's a tossup whether Izuku can protect everyone until they come. Plus, Sir Nighteye needs medical attention *soon*.

He could take Eri and try to run. But while Izuku is fairly certain he's a bit faster than the Yakuza, Chisaki might just grab Nighteye, Aizawa, or Togata and use them to threaten Izuku to come back. He's already done it to Eri, after all. And Izuku can't possibly carry Nighteye, Aizawa, Togata, *and* Eri while running away from Chisaki. One For All will give him more than enough strength for it, but there's no way his smaller body can handle their sheer combined bulk and still have enough speed.

That really leaves him with only one option.

Take Chisaki down as quickly as possible.

Easier said than done.

"Quirks are an infection, you say?" Izuku speaks up, hoping to find what makes the man tick. He needs any sliver of advantage he can get over Chisaki. "Then how come you didn't inject yourself with the drug as soon as you made it?"

“You wouldn’t understand. People like you can never see the big picture!” the man sneers. But then he narrows his eyes. “But speaking of the drugs... I know you. You have a fire quirk and some form of telekinesis, didn’t you? But you haven’t used it. ...Your quirk has been at least partially erased, hasn’t it?”

His voice borders on vindictive righteousness.

“You see, Eri? Just like Lemillion, your quirk destroyed your ‘hero’. Your very existence is a curse!”

Izuku feels Eri *flinch* in his arms.

“No,” Izuku firmly denies immediately, addressing Eri and not Chisaki. “Eri, you *saved* me. Don’t forget that. Never let *anyone* make you doubt it.”

Eri looks up at him with wide eyes glistening with unshed tears, torn between their two opposing statements.

“You’re worse than Lemillion,” Chisaki hisses irritably.

With that the villain slams his hands down on the floor again and stony tendrils shoot their way towards Izuku and Eri. True to the police’s intel that he’s a clean freak, Chisaki seems to favour long-range combat over getting his hands bloody if he can help it.

This would have been so much more manageable if Izuku had his fire and pull.

But even if he doesn’t have his original quirk, he is not powerless. He has the strength of eight wielders of One For All. He has the strength of the Number One Hero.

Izuku feels his lips peel back.

He bares his teeth.

And he *grins*.

Chisaki sees only the fleeting vision of a savage grin that’s on the verge of a snarl as his spikes pierce only empty air.

“What—?”

The man whirls around at the crackle of Full Cowl and sends more lines of spikes chasing after Izuku, but Izuku dodges them far more

easily than before.

Ever since his first internship with Gran Torino, Izuku had always used Full Cowl at the upper limit of the percentage of One For All his body could safely withstand. But it's been months since then, and Izuku isn't the same person he was then. His body can take more.

Full Cowl at 5% wasn't nearly enough against Chisaki.

Full Cowl at 8% lets Izuku just barely evade his spikes while holding Eri.

Izuku dodges all the spikes, trying to draw Chisaki's attention away from Sir Nighteye while also slowly working his way closer to Chisaki so he can deal a blow (and wow if only he had his fire so he could attack from a range, but he *doesn't* have it so he's just going to have to deal with it—).

The entire room shudders and rumbles as Chisaki sends waves of spikes at Izuku and Eri. Izuku dodges and kicks off the spikes while shielding Eri with his arms from the rubble. And once he works his way closer until he's only a few meters away from Chisaki, he makes his move.

Things would have been so much easier if Izuku had his fire and pull.

But he *doesn't*, so instead, he calls on One For All, feels it surge up in his limbs and crackle through his veins.

Full Cowl, 20%.

Izuku shoots towards Chisaki like a bullet. The Yakuza's eyes are wide, taken off guard since Izuku's current speed far outclasses himself moments ago at 5% or even 8%. Izuku kicks through the thin spikes Chisaki hastily throws in his way and swings around for his head. The villain just barely dodges by almost throwing himself on the ground, and his nose scrunches and his eyes are enraged as dust coats him.

As previously mentioned, the upper limit of One For All Izuku can fully handle is 8%. At 20% his bones are creaking and his muscles are screaming and he's straining past his limit, but he can still move, he can still fight, and now he has Chisaki on his back and it'll only take one blow to the head to knock him out.

In what seems like a last-ditch effort, Chisaki twists so that his palm

slaps against the ground. A spear of earth bursts forth but it seems the trajectory is off in his haste, even if Izuku is grazed he can still knock Chisaki out before he can do anything else, he's so close to ending this —

—Wait.

The spear isn't aimed at Izuku's heart.

It's aimed at Eri's head.

Eri squeezes her eyes shut, bracing for pain, accepting it, *used to* it. But *fuck* that, Izuku promised he'd *save* her, and so it isn't even a choice when he gives up the golden opportunity to take down Chisaki and instead leaps away from him.

The spear misses both Eri and Izuku by a hair's breadth.

"It's okay," Izuku whispers to Eri as she tentatively opens her eyes. "We're okay."

But even as he whispers reassurances to her, his gut wrenches as he watches Chisaki rise to his feet.

"Infected," Chisaki sneers with disdain as he dusts himself off. "Even if you're fast, your movements are far too predictable compared to the other two."

The other two. Nighteye and Togata. Of course Izuku isn't up to their level, not just because he's less experienced, but because he came to Nighteye's agency specifically to learn that kind of prediction and tactical planning.

But that aside, the greatest reason Chisaki was able to get the upper hand was that he targeted Eri without a moment's hesitation.

Chisaki just used Eri as bait. If Izuku had been even a fraction of a moment too late, Eri would have been hurt or she could have even died. But Chisaki didn't care. He used her anyway, as if he sees her as just a tool, as if it's the most obvious thing in the world.

Then again, why wouldn't he when he can always just 'reassemble' her?

It makes Izuku sick.

Anyone else might have raged and asked something along the lines of

‘*how could you do that to your own daughter?*’

Togata already has.

But Izuku doesn’t, because he knows all too well that just because someone is your father doesn’t mean they won’t *hurt* you.

Even if Chisaki isn’t actually Eri’s father, he’s still her dictator and abuser. He is still the one who torments her days and plagues her nightmares. And that’s what really matters.

Chisaki snarls with annoyance and frustration as the fight is prolonged yet again.

“You’re only delaying the inevitable!”

This time, instead of sending a line of spikes aiming at Izuku, the entire room ruptures and bursts into sharp piercing spikes. In his growing frustration and desperation, he doesn’t seem to even care about injuring Eri anymore.

Izuku whips around and rushes to Sir Nighteye (*fuck* does he wish he could have just *pulled* the hero out of harm’s way) and stands between him and the villain. There’s nowhere to run to, so he amps up One For All to 20% again and stomps on the ground in front of them, redirecting and breaking the spikes before they even form. His bones feel brittle and his muscles feel like they’re tearing apart, but the force is enough to halt the reassembly before it reaches Nighteye.

Both Eri and Nighteye haven’t been injured any more, but Izuku lost all the ground he gained on Chisaki by rushing to Nighteye’s aid.

As if knowing this (of course he does) the hero weakly calls Izuku.

“Midoriya,” Nighteye hacks up a bloody cough. “Don’t— don’t bother trying to save me. I saw… I *saw*.”

Nighteye saw a future where he is killed. He saw a future where Izuku dies trying to protect him. He saw a future where Chisaki escapes with Eri, rendering Mirio’s desperate efforts pointless.

His eyes are hollow as Izuku turns back to look at him. He doesn’t elaborate what he saw with his Foresight but the haunted look in his eyes tells Izuku more than enough.

Once upon a time, Nighteye believed that his quirk meant he could

prevent bad things from happening. But no matter how hard he tried, no matter how desperately he struggled, no matter how much he worked or prayed or begged, the future he saw always came true. Anything he did only delayed the outcome. Nothing he did changed the future.

It's one of the reasons he fought so violently for All Might's retirement. Because even while he told All Might that they might be able to avoid his death and change the future Nighteye saw, part of him believed (*knew*) it was inevitable.

And just like that vision, Nighteye knows that this future too will come to pass. His Foresight is absolute. Nothing can change.

"Anything you do is only delaying the inevitable," the hero echoes Chisaki's words defeatedly.

His words ring with distraught dejection and bone-weary resignation. He's spent a lifetime trying to change the outcome of his Foresight only to fail time and time again until he's finally come to accept Fate. Accept his own death.

(Accept All Might's death.)

But Izuku doesn't.

Izuku has never given up when he was told to. He's smashed convention, rules, and his own bones to save people even when they don't want his help.

And if Nighteye says their deaths are *Fate*, well.

He'll smash that too.

"Sorry, Sir," Izuku says, his tone gentle and his smile soft despite everything, "but I don't believe that your Foresight means the future is set in stone. Even if it is predetermined, I'll smash that future to pieces."

And Nighteye wants to weep at those words because it's exactly the kind of thing All Might would say. It's exactly the kind of thing All Might would do. For as much as Nighteye wanted to hate Midoriya, the boy is so much like the hero, like *his* hero that it hurts. But no matter how alike they are, Midoriya *isn't* All Might, and he isn't enough, Nighteye's seen what will happen, he knows what will happen, he *knows*—

“It’s alright,” Izuku says, both to Nighteye and to the girl he’s holding in his arms. “We’ll be alright.”

Sir Nighteye doesn’t believe him.

But Eri *does*.

“Eri!” Chisaki shouts from across the room. “You heard him. Even the pro hero knows it’s inevitable. It’s no use. So be a good girl and *come back*.”

She would have, just a handful of moments ago. Any biting order or threat would have been enough to make Eri crumble and run back to her abuser. But just as Izuku’s arm tightens around her, Eri too tightens her arms around her hero’s neck and turns to look back at Chisaki.

For the first time, she lifts her chin and looks him in the eye.

“No.”

It’s only a single word. Barely anything more than a whisper breathed against Izuku’s throat. Her voice may have hitched, and her arms may have trembled, but she is firm and unwavering in her denial.

It’s the first time Eri refused Chisaki.

And with that, something bursts into life.

Power crackles and sparks like static electricity from the horn on Eri’s forehead, pulsating as her quirk awakens. Izuku gasps as the power takes hold of him, shooting through his core and coursing in his veins. He feels it do *something* to him, it changes and shifts something within him but he doesn’t have time to think about that because Chisaki is roaring and sending an avalanche of deadly spikes at them. Izuku tries to stop it, to stomp down with Full Cowl, he wills them to stop and—

Fire bursts out of Izuku.

Bright flames roar and erupt to the ceiling, blinding Chisaki and forcing him to step back.

“It’s been triggered,” the villain grits out as he holds up an arm against the blaze. “This is why I never touch her. No one’s taught her how to use her quirk, and yet…!”

In the centre of the flames, in the eye of the storm, Izuku holds Eri to

his chest, having shielded her from the blaze with his own body. He tentatively lets her lift her head as the flames die down, looking down at her with wide eyes.

“My quirk...”

That’s all he gets out before a searing pain rips through his body.

“...!”

Izuku’s knees hit the ground. He keeps his hold on Eri, refusing to let go of her, but it feels like his body is being torn apart, like he’s being pulled inside out.

“You’re being rewound,” Chisaki growls as he deconstructs then reassembles his own arm, healing the burns from Izuku’s fire. “Something triggered your quirk, but you can’t regulate it, can you, Eri? You don’t know how to stop! You rewound him enough that he regained his quirk, but if you go on, you’ll rewind him out of existence. That’s the nature of your cursed quirk.”

Her fault, is what Chisaki is saying. It scares Eri to her core that she might kill her hero. She tries to let go of Izuku, to push off, to get away from him, to save him from herself—

“...If you don’t let go, you’ll be rewound out of existence. Hand her over. Annihilating her is the only way to stop that curse!”

—but Izuku doesn’t let her go, doesn’t let her hurt herself in trying to save him, because—

A curse?

Something *pulls* Chisaki forward right into a blast of flames. While the villain is distracted Izuku bolts over to Sir Nighteye and guides Eri’s hand to the barely breathing hero.

Unlike being reassembled by Chisaki, being rewound by Eri may hurt but it doesn’t leave any lingering trauma. On the contrary, Izuku’s body isn’t screaming from abuse anymore. So if Eri’s quirk rewinds all that pain and trauma and abuse from him, then what if she uses her quirk on Sir Nighteye?

Her horn pulsates, crackling with energy, and then right before their eyes Sir Nighteye’s wounds are rewound to leave unblemished skin under Eri’s hand. Nighteye breathes easily, blinking rapidly up at Eri

who is staring at what her quirk did with equal disbelief. Both are stunned, Nighteye at what his quirk finally got wrong and Eri at what her quirk finally did right.

“Oh Eri,” Izuku breathes, gathering the speechless girl in a tight hug. “Your quirk isn’t a curse, it’s a blessing. You *saved* him. Thank you *so much*.”

Eri is still for a moment.

And then she’s hugging Izuku back just as fiercely.

Izuku steps away from Nighteye so he won’t be rewound any further than he needs to be.

“Sir, please, go check on Eraserhead and Togata Senpai.”

For a moment Nighteye seems like he’ll object, but then—perhaps acknowledging the fact that Izuku is better suited to take on Chisaki, perhaps because worry for his student urges him, or perhaps simply overwhelmed that Izuku and Eri *actually changed the future*—Nighteye nods and dashes away.

With Nighteye out of the vicinity, Izuku turns up Full Cowl.

Quirk analysis is Izuku’s specialty, after all. Now that he’s taken a moment to adjust, Izuku gets a grip on how much and how fast Eri’s quirk rewinds. So theoretically, if he keeps breaking himself at the same rate as he’s rewound, then he’ll always be kept at top condition.

20% isn’t enough to keep up with Eri. 30%, 40% 50%, 70%, he keeps increasing the percentage of One For All until he can match her. Full Cowl crackles like green electricity all around his body, snapping and glowing brighter than ever before. 80%, 90%, 100...

100%.

He reaches 100%.

One For All, Full Cowling, 100%.

Power courses through his limbs, singing in his blood and roaring in his ears. He wonders if this is what All Might feels like, because right now Izuku certainly *feels* like an unstoppable hero.

Izuku can’t help it.

He *grins*.

“Eri,” he calls. “Will you lend me your help? We can save everyone.”

We, Izuku said. Save not just Eri, but *everyone*, he said.

“Yeah...!” Eri nods, tears glistening in her eyes but her expression closer to a smile than Izuku has ever seen.

“Enough!” a snarl echoes from the other end of the cavern. It seems that Chisaki used the time Izuku and Eri were distracted to fuse with the very earth itself, creating a gigantic beast with the arms of his subordinate sticking out behind his back.

“Neither you nor Eri can see the value in this! Her quirk isn’t merely for rewinding injuries or people. She can affect the very evolution of our species, rewinding us to a state before the mutations known as quirks ever happened. Don’t you see?! This is bigger than you, bigger than any one person! Breaking (壊) the reason (□) of this world of quirks, that is what Eri (壊□) is! Why won’t anyone see the bigger picture?!”

The man rants and raves at them, towering over Izuku and Eri.

When facing Hisashi, Izuku had always been silent. Even if he trembled and tears streamed down his face and his knees wobbled, he was always silent.

But Izuku isn’t the helpless child he was then, and after facing villains and overlords and living nightmares he’s grown something of a mouth on him.

“The bigger picture?” he shoots back. “How can you do that if you can’t even see one girl in front of you?”

Izuku makes sure to hold Eri in an infinitely gentle embrace even with the power of One For All’s 100% coursing through his limbs. (All Might gives *great* hugs even in his buffed form, after all, and Izuku learned from the best.) When Chisaki roars and leaps for them, he’s ready.

Dozens of arms and spikes lash out at them. They’re made of dirt and rock and concrete and metal, anything Chisaki could scrape up from the structure around them. But with Full Cowl at 100%, Izuku can just straight up *smash* through anything Chisaki throws at them.

Chisaki's eyes widen as Izuku and Eri blow past him and everything he made. Izuku clicks his tongue when he misses the villain and has to pivot off the far wall instead. He's never used One For All at 100% aside from his fingers so it's hard to judge his own strength and speed. But just as Aizawa once said, a hero always has more than one trick up their sleeve. And thanks to Eri, Izuku now has three.

Even though Izuku missed him by a mile, Chisaki finds himself *pulled* into the trajectory of a burst of flames. The man hastily constructs walls between the fire and himself to avoid getting burned, but in doing so, he made the mistake of obscuring his own vision. That's what Izuku counted on.

In the moment Chisaki loses sight of him, Izuku circles around and smashes through Chisaki's barrier from behind. Anything the man assembles crumbles like a house of cards in the face of One For All 100%. Chisaki doesn't even have time to turn around and face Izuku when he smashes through the beast of earth that was protecting the man's back and delivers a powerful kick to his spine.

"—!"

The only reason Chisaki doesn't lose then and there is because unlike Sir Nighteye or Togata, Izuku still lacks experience in fighting villains. And in the split second he let off, Chisaki disassembles and reassembles himself, healing his injuries in a flash.

He slams his palms into the ground as soon as he's remade, shooting off projectiles at Eri, but unlike the last time Izuku bats them away with ease. Not even targeting Eri gives Chisaki an edge anymore. He feels a trail of cold sweat trickle down his back.

The Yakuza backs off in a haste. While he can disassemble and reassemble parts of his body to heal, he tries to avoid remaking his entire body. Even Chisaki himself can't handle being unmade so many times in a short period of time, after all. But faced with the sheer might of One For All's 100% *and* Izuku's fire and pull, he doesn't see a way to avoid it. He doesn't see a way he can win.

And you see, Chisaki was never one to run. He was dead set on fulfilling his goal no matter what, but this— this is something he never foresaw happening. He'd chosen to act now in particular for a reason, so that he could rise up in the power vacuum left with the fall of both All Might and All For One. But he couldn't have known he'd face the strength of the Number One Hero and *more*.

For the first time in his life, Chisaki is overwhelmed.

He panics.

Eri is vital to his plans, but in the face of someone he has no hope of defeating, he gives her up. He gives up.

For the first time in his life, Chisaki turns tail and *runs*.

Instead of trying to run away from Izuku's far superior speed, Chisaki reassembles the entire cavern and opens up the ceiling. The very walls around them rumble and shudder as the room yawns and opens up to a street above ground. Izuku has to pause in his pursuit to shield Eri from the falling rubble, and during that time Chisaki detaches from the earthen beast and escapes above ground on a platform.

"Wha— Overhaul?!"

"He's getting away!"

"What happened to Nighteye and the others?!"

Izuku hears the police and other heroes' surprised voices. When he looks up at the hole he finds Ryuku's agency along with Asui and Uraraka.

At the sight of them, Izuku thinks of a plan.

"Uraraka! Asui!"

The two girls turn at his voice and look down into the hole to find him.

"Deku!"

"What happened?! Overhaul is getting away!"

"I know! There's no time! Uraraka, float me when I get there! Asui, throw me at Chisaki!"

It's probably a testament to their trust and bond that neither Uraraka or Asui pause or even question Izuku's sudden request. Izuku jumps with One For All's 100% and *pulls* himself out of the hole with his right arm outstretched. Just as he passes the rim Uraraka reaches out to high-five him, taking away his gravity, and Asui doesn't even pause to quip her usual 'call me Tsuyu' before she wraps her tongue around his waist and flings him towards the streets Chisaki is escaping into.

Izuku and Eri shoot through the air, flying like a bullet. But they have to get to Chisaki faster to stop him from destroying more civilian houses.

And that's where Izuku's new special move comes in.

He has the momentum from Asui's throw, Izuku's pull, and One For All. His gravity has been taken away by Uraraka. And now, all he needs is a little more *push*.

Flames burst out of his back. They propel him forward, like boosters, like *wings*, and he's not quite flying but it's close enough.

Izuku remembers his oldest and most recent nightmares. He dreamed of falling with burning wings, and he dreamed that Eri was falling with him. But now she's in his arms and instead of falling they're all but *flying*.

It's better than he ever hoped for when he named his new special move:

Icarus.

Eri's eyes are wide as she clings to Izuku. Since she's being held to his chest and has her chin hooked over his shoulder, Eri has a clear view of the firey wings as they streak through the sky.

"Angel?"

Her whisper full of wonder and awe is whipped away in the wind.

Izuku doesn't hear Eri's whisper over the wind, his eyes trained on Chisaki as the villain tries to run away while obstructing the heroes from following him by blocking the streets with his quirk.

You don't get to run away, Izuku thinks. Not after everything you've done, not after you never let Eri run. It wouldn't be fair.

And that's the thing, isn't it?

Life *isn't* fair, and it certainly isn't kind.

*Which is why **we** must be.*

"Let's end this, Eri."

Chisaki turns at the sound of whistling wind approaching. The sight of

Izuku and Eri flying through the air with wings of fire trailing behind them is reflected in his panicked eyes for a split second before he is *pulled* to a stop. The villain's eyes flash as he opens his mouth in a last attempt to change the tables.

"Eri—!"

But Izuku doesn't give him a chance spew any more vile words in Eri's ears. He drops from the sky and pulls Chisaki towards him, his left arm holding Eri and his right arm pulled back.

Once upon a time, Izuku had never even thought of the possibility of going against Hisashi. Stain called it selflessness. Izuku thought it was weakness. But whatever it was, Chisaki is not Hisashi, and Izuku is not the crying child he once was.

And Izuku has always been at his strongest when he has someone to protect.

He draws back his fist, charges up One For All, and punches Chisaki in the face.

The full force of One For All *smashes* into the man. The Yakuza boss doesn't even manage to scream as all the armour he'd constructed around himself is shattered and his plague mask is torn off his face.

Chisaki hits the ground with a thud, knocked out cold before he can reassemble himself.

Izuku and Eri land a few steps away on the demolished street. As soon as Izuku makes sure Chisaki is unconscious he turns to the girl in his arms.

"Eri, are you alright?" Izuku asks, letting her pull back just enough to scan her for injuries. Fortunately, she looks unharmed.

Eri looks up at him with wide eyes. Her small hands had fisted in his hero suit but she opens one hand to bring up to Izuku's cheek.

"We're alright," Eri corrects him, a note of wonder and cautious joy creeping into her voice. "*We're* alright."

Oh, Eri.

Izuku can't help but smile a little brokenly at just how kind this girl is despite everything.

“We are,” he reassures her.

But because life isn’t fair, and it certainly isn’t kind, just as he utters those words a violent pulse of energy throbs through Izuku’s body.

“Wha—?”

Izuku almost loses his grip on Eri at the sudden pain. His knees buckle and hit the ground again as he finds himself hunching over Eri, gasping for breath.

Eri’s quirk is getting stronger, and even continually destroying himself with One For All 100% isn’t enough to keep up anymore.

Lend me your help, Izuku had said, so Eri had unfurled her quirk, channelling it to the fullest without knowing how to control it. It’s similar to when Izuku first couldn’t control One For All and could only use 100%. Even with the threat of Chisaki now gone, she doesn’t know how to stop.

“No...!” Eri screams at herself, tears overflowing. She wants to back away, wants to distance herself, but the output of her quirk is so strong that she finds herself rooted to the spot. “Stop! Please! This person will *die!* I don’t want... I’m *so sorry*—!”

And at those words, Izuku finds the strength to raise his hand to Eri’s back again.

“We’ll be alright,” he promises in a strangled voice. “*We’ll be alright.*”

Izuku’s mind is in overdrive. However strong Eri’s power is, it’s still a quirk. And quirk analysis is Izuku’s specialty.

Even though it’s the power of eight generations worth of people, even though it’s the power of the Number One Hero, there’s only so much damage One For All can do. If not even Full Cowl 100% is enough to keep up with Eri’s power, then Izuku needs to find a way to destroy himself even more or he’ll be rewound out of existence by Eri’s quirk. And he can’t do that to her. He can’t give her the memories and guilt of having killed erased him. He needs to do something. He needs more destruction.

And, well, he already has the perfect thing for that.

Izuku remembers his training with Todoroki and Shinsou. All this time he’d been training not to burn himself, but this time, for once, he

needs to do the opposite.

Izuku bursts into flames. The fire envelops him like a pair of wings, shrouding his body, eating away his hero suit, burning through his flesh, only for it to be rewound back. Izuku hugs Eri and shields her from the flames, gritting his teeth at the sensation of being burned and torn to shreds and squeezed to a speck and pulled inside out, and Eri cries and screams in his ear—

—until suddenly, he doesn't feel anything.

Eri's scream cuts off as abruptly as her power. The flames swoosh out of existence, the sudden absence of One For All leaving his limbs hollow.

Izuku collapses onto his back so he doesn't fall onto the girl and squish her. He barely manages to turn his head enough to find Aizawa looking at them with red eyes.

A breath of laughter that's barely a huff makes its way out of Izuku's mouth.

My hero.

Izuku raises a tired hand to pat Eri's head which is nestled against his chest.

"See, Eri?" Izuku whispers. "We're alright."

They're alright.

*

Someone takes a seat on the couch across from Nighteye. Nighteye doesn't look up, even when the person gently sets a cup of coffee on the table in a silent offering.

Neither of them speaks for a moment that feels like an eternity.

In the end, it's Nighteye who caves first.

"...How is Midoriya?"

The person shifts slightly.

“He is with Aizawa,” they answer, confirming that they went to see Midoriya before coming here. But to be honest, Nighteye isn’t as mad as he’d thought he’d be. Nighteye himself would be with Mirio at this very moment if the doctors let him, after all.

“The doctors say he’s physically fine, so Aizawa is taking him to see the girl…”

“He’s not fine,” Nighteye interjects sharply. “He *died* three times. He *shouldn’t* be fine.”

Nighteye pauses, then shakes his head.

“Forgive me. Just… talk to him.”

“I will,” they promise readily. They hesitate for a moment before asking a question of their own. “How… how is Togata?”

Nighteye’s shoulders slump. He rests his elbows on his knees and bows his head.

“His quirk has been completely erased.” It still makes Nighteye’s blood boil. On one hand, he wants to rage at the unfairness that it had to be his student to suffer like this and have his future snatched away. But on the other hand, it makes him *so damn proud* since it’s proof of just how much Overhaul feared Lemillion. “At the very least, there’s still hope. We have a precedent where Eri returned Midoriya’s quirk. It may take a while until she can control it, but she could return Mirio’s quirk too. And the doctors say his body will make a quick recovery.”

“That is… good news,” the person says hesitantly.

“It is,” Nighteye agrees. And then, before he can stop himself, he blurts out, “…I can see why you chose him.”

“Who?”

“Midoriya,” Nighteye bites out. It should be obvious, shouldn’t it? “I didn’t see it at first. Or maybe I didn’t want to see it. But he’s so much like you… All Might.”

With those words, Nighteye finally raises his head.

All Might sits on the sofa across from him, face gaunt and deep-set eyes weary. It’s been six years since they’ve been face to face, and the

visible toll that time had on the hero (his hero) makes Nighteye's heart clench.

"...All these years. My *entire life*, I've tried to change the outcome I saw with my Foresight. Never once did I succeed. And I... I gave up. I accepted that my quirk is absolute," Nighteye confesses. Confesses that he accepted All Might's death.

"But then your heir walks up and casually smashes everything I believed in. I was supposed to die today. Midoriya was supposed to die today. But instead, he changed the future."

And the thing is, despite everything, Nighteye isn't even bitter. Shellshocked and dazed, to be sure. But bitter? No.

Not when he proved All Might can live.

A huff of dry laughter escapes Nighteye's lips.

So much for his foresight.

All Might shakes his head at Nighteye's self-deprecation.

"It's not just young Midoriya. Like you, I had accepted my fate. That night in Kamino... I thought I was going to die," All Might admits quietly. "But I've decided to fight against Fate. Midoriya showed us it's possible. We *will* change the future, Nighteye."

We, Nighteye notes.

All Might probably doesn't know how sweetly that word stings.

But perhaps Nighteye let something show on his face because All Might falters for a moment.

The silence that hangs between them is thick and heavy.

This time, though, it's All Might who breaks it.

"I'm sorry."

Nighteye could have snapped back '*What for?*' He could have let the years of hurt lash out. But '*All Might loves you,*' a voice that he can no longer even pretend to hate whispers in his ear. So Nighteye puts down all his barriers and answers honestly.

"I know. ...So am I."

He meets All Might's eyes. All Might smiles at him, small and frail yet full of hope.

Nighteye smiles back.

This doesn't make everything alright, of course. There are still years of hurt and neglect they need to work through to even begin rebuilding what they once had.

But it's a start.

He's more than okay with that.

Nighteye finally reaches for the cup of coffee All Might had set on the table. He sees All Might perk up and watch with baited breath as Nighteye takes a sip.

Black, Nighteye notes, with only a drizzle of syrup.

Just how he likes it, even after all these years.

Yes, Nighteye thinks as a lump that has nothing to do with the coffee forms in his throat. He's more than okay with this.

*

It's nighttime of the next day by the time Midoriya, Kirishima, Uraraka, and Asui returned from their internships back to the dorms.

Everyone in Class 1-A had waited to greet them in the common room of the dorms; even Bakugo, though he'd probably never admit it. They all saw the news yesterday—shots of Uraraka and Asui helping with the cleanup after the battle with the Shie Hassaikai (and Shouto knows there must have been a gag order, but really, the Yakuza?!), Kirishima being carried out on a stretcher, and a shaky clip of Midoriya with his fiery wings blazoned across the sky—so while they were proud of their classmates, they were worried as well.

Personally, Shouto thinks it's a miracle Midoriya made out of it unharmed. (This was before he learned that the other boy had fucking *died* three times, and nope, Shouto's never letting Midoriya out of his sight *ever* again—)

Their classmates had crowded around the interns, patting their backs and chattering. Hagakure had given Uraraka and Asui a big hug. Sato immediately brought something called Gateau au Chocolat and fed it to the tired interns while Yaoyorozu brought some relaxing tea to go with the cake. Kouda brought his pet rabbit and handed her to a confused Midoriya. Shouto didn't understand it either, but he hadn't complained as he raised his phone to snap a photo of Midoriya blinking down at the ball of fluff in his arms.

And that was when it happened. Just as Shouto was looking at the photo he took, the soft smile that had crept on his face had frozen when he saw he had a new message.

It was from Endeavor.

That single text message had been enough to shake Shouto so much that he had to excuse himself and retire to his room early.

So here he is now, sitting alone in his room trying to wrestle his mess of emotions back to place when he could be—when he *should* be—out there celebrating the safe return of his friends with his classmates. This should have been a good evening. He should have been happy and relieved to have Midoriya and the others back unharmed. But Endeavor managed to sour his entire day with just a single text.

It's so... *unfair*.

But just as Shouto thinks these words, his dark thoughts are interrupted by a soft knock on the door. Shouto blinks, shakes his head to chase away the tendrils of thought, and rises to open his door and finds—

"Midoriya?"

"Hey," the other boy greets with a smile that Shouto instantly returns despite his bad mood mere seconds ago. "You didn't stay for the cake so I saved you a piece."

He's holding a plate of the chocolaty sweet and a mug of steaming milk.

Shouto feels like his heart does a funny little squirm where it tries to melt and clench at the same time— melt with affection at more proof that Midoriya cares for him, but clench with guilt that Shouto made him worry when he should be resting after all he's been through the past few days.

Midoriya steps inside Shouto's room at his invitation and sets the treats on his desk.

"Thank you," Shouto smiles.

"It's nothing. But, Todoroki, I wanted to ask... What happened?"

Shouto freezes as Midoriya turns back to face him, concern written clearly across his expression.

"...Why would something have happened?"

Midoriya doesn't scoff, but he does roll his eyes.

"Please. I know you better than that.

Yes, Midoriya does. The corners of Shouto's lips twitch upwards.

"If you'd rather not talk about it for a personal reason, that's fine. But if you *do* want to talk about it but are holding back because you think you'll be a bother to me or something— well. *You* should know *me* better than that."

Yes, Shouto does.

Any other day, Shouto would have gone knocking on Midoriya's door first and asked to talk about this. Even if Midoriya can't actually solve any of his problems, they know that talking to each other can at least make them feel better. But Midoriya has just come back from fighting a villain organization (and fighting his past, judging by what he's heard from Uraraka and Kirishima) so he already has more than enough on his plate. Shouto shouldn't add to that by bothering him with his own petty emotional difficulties.

But Shouto *does* know Midoriya, and he also knows that if the situation was reversed, he would want Midoriya to talk to him too rather than suffer alone.

"...Endeavor messaged me," Shouto finally admits. "He says he's coming to watch my remedial class for the licence exam tomorrow."

Midoriya's eyes narrow at the mention of his father.

(Shouto wonders if it's odd for him to find it so endearing whenever Midoriya shows contempt for Endeavor on Shouto's behalf.)

"When I saw his message, I just... blanked for a moment. And it

frustrates me that he still has so much influence over me. ...But I'll be fine soon, I promise. Besides, it's not like there's anything I can do to stop him."

Midoriya's brows droop.

"I wish there was something I could do, or at least go with you for moral support..." he trails off, then perks up. "Oh! Wait here for a sec, I'll be right back!"

Midoriya dashes out of Shouto's room only to return a few moments later with his green stuffed bunny under his arm. The sight reminds Shouto of the photo he took earlier.

"I wish I could do more to help," Midoriya says apologetically, "but I can't think of anything that can actually help except trying to cheer you up. And sometimes when I feel down I find that hugging this kinda helps, and I don't know if it'll work for you too but it doesn't hurt to try, right, and if you don't like the bunny I can bring the Pomeranian too and wow I'm rambling too much so, uh, just, here."

With that Midoriya pushes the green stuffed bunny into Shouto's arms.

Shouto blinks down at the green ball of fluff in his arms, then raises his gaze to blink at Midoriya. The other boy makes a hugging gesture so Shouto experimentally squeezes his arms around the stuffed animal.

It's soft to touch, he finds, and supple enough to be a comforting weight in his arms. Shouto drops his head to bury his face in its soft green fur.

It smells like Midoriya.

The line of tension that had been in Shouto's shoulder relaxes instantly. Shouto inhales deeply, closing his eyes.

"...Can I have the Pomeranian too?" he finds himself asking, his voice muffled against all the fur and cotton.

Midoriya laughs, sounding relieved.

"Glad to see it helps! You can have anything, anytime."

Then can I have you, now?

It's only when Shouto lifts his head at the silence to find Midoriya staring at him with wide eyes that he realizes he just said that out

loud.

“I—”

Shouto opens his mouth to give some kind of excuse, but to be honest, he doesn’t even know what to say. Not *‘I didn’t mean it’* when he did. Not *‘it was just a joke’* when it wasn’t.

But in the end it doesn’t matter because instead of drawing out the awkward silence or avoiding him, Midoriya smiles and hesitantly opens his arms. (Because you see, for all that Izuku hadn’t been used to physical contact that isn’t violent, he’s received some *great* hugs throughout the year and he knows just how much it can help.)

This isn’t exactly what Shouto meant, but it’s more than good enough. Shouto feels his stomach drop to his gut and a lump form in his throat. He swallows hard before he carefully sets the stuffed bunny on his futon, and then steps into Midoriya’s waiting embrace.

This should be awkward, or even embarrassing. But even though Midoriya is far more muscular under his clothes than Shouto expected, even though they bump their toes as they try to position themselves, it just feels so *right* when he slides his arms snugly around Midoriya’s shoulders and holds him close. Midoriya circles his own arms around Shouto’s waist and Shouto leans into him, trusting the other boy to support their weight.

He uses his height advantage to rub his cheek against the top of Midoriya’s head, and yes, this is *so much better* than a stuffed animal.

Midoriya laughs at Shouto’s actions. (And gods, Shouto can *feel* the laughter rumbling through his own chest.)

“You’re such a cat,” Midoriya says fondly.

“Bunny,” Shouto shoots back.

“Am not!”

“Are too.”

The familiar banter only helps to ease the tension from thinking about Endeavor. Shouto’s tumultuous emotions melt away at the warmth emitting from Midoriya, both literal and figurative.

He really is the sun, Shouto thinks, leaning his cheek against

Midoriya's head and holding him close.

Nothing has really changed. Endeavor will still come tomorrow, and Shouto will still have to see him.

But with an armful of stars, he can face his shadows.

That night, Shouto falls asleep surrounded by Midoriya's bunny, Pomeranian, and guinea pig stuffed animals.

His dreams are uninterupted by nightmares.

*

Izuku hadn't been allowed to visit Eri after she was rescued, but a few days later, Aizawa comes to bring him to the hospital and meet her.

"She's been asking for you," the hero explains. "This is the first time she's spoken up for anything, and we want to encourage that. Plus, the horn on her forehead has shrunken down, which we think means her quirk is spent out. There's less of a risk that her quirk will activate, so we've authorized your visit."

Aizawa pauses, then adds.

"I will be supervising you from another room, just in case, so don't worry. I heard you destroyed your body to keep up with her and avoid being rewound out of existence, but try to avoid that today."

"I'll try my best," Izuku promises. He doesn't want a repeat of last time either, for Eri's sake more than his own.

They arrive at a secluded wing in the hospital. Izuku can see Eri through the opened door, and she looks a little lost as she stares down at her hands.

"Hello, Eri," Izuku calls as he steps into her room.

The girl visibly perks up when she looks up and spots Izuku.

"It's you! The angel!"

Izuku sputters. Aizawa hides a cough into his hand that sounds suspiciously like a strangled laugh, but he ruffles Izuku's hair and leaves saying he'll give them some privacy and that he'll be in the next room.

"Um. An angel?" Izuku asks weakly as he takes a seat next to Eri on her bed. (He can imagine the devilishly pleased grin Uraraka would wear if she ever hears this nickname. She would love Eri.)

Eri fidgets a little.

"I know Lemillion, but I don't know your name so..."

Izuku could smack himself.

"Oh. That's my fault, I should have introduced myself. My name is Midoriya Izuku! Uh, my hero name is Deku, though, so you can use that too if you want since it's shorter."

Eri looks at him uncertainly.

"Deku...?"

He knows why she's looking at him like that. 'Deku' is an insult, after all, pointing to someone who is useless and can't do anything. But Uraraka had changed its meaning. And just like his quirk, Izuku will take what used to hurt him and make it *his* to become the best hero he can be.

"It sounds like 'Dekiru (I can do it)' doesn't it?"

Eri's eyes widen in realization as she nods.

But all too soon, she drops her eyes again.

"I... I wanted to apologize," she says quietly. "Lemillion lost his quirk because of me. That person with the glasses almost died because of me too. You *did* die because of me, and I *know* how much that hurts—," (Izuku's hearts *squeezes* painfully at how nonchalantly she says that) "—and you said that I helped save everyone, but they wouldn't have needed to be saved if it wasn't for me. If only I didn't have this quirk. It... it's all my fault."

Her fault, her fault, her fault.

Make no mistake, Izuku's words had reached Eri. But now that a few days have passed, familiar doubt and despair crept up like an old

companion. It's all she's ever known, after all, and even though Chisaki is behind bars and will never lay his eyes on Eri again, Eri is still far from being free of him.

Izuku knows what that feels like.

He knows how abrupt and disconcerting it can be when your abuser is suddenly just gone. He knows how hard it can be to believe that it's over. He knows that even with so many people helping and caring for you, a moment is all it can take for all that healing and progress to be set back. He knows that a few words are nowhere near enough to undo years of abuse. He knows what it's like to feel stained by memories and chained to a ghost.

He knows, he understands, and most of all, he *empathizes*.

So while Izuku's heart *breaks* for Eri, he doesn't show that on his face as he stands up from his seat on the bed next to her and kneels in front of her instead. Izuku takes her small hands into his own.

"It's not your fault," he denies gently. Eri's arms are swathed in bandages and Izuku's own hands are scared and blocky with deformed bones, but their hands are warm as Izuku clasps Eri's hands.

"Yes, it's true that Chisaki used your quirk to harm others. Yes, it caused Lemillion to lose his quirk. Yes, we were all there to save you."

He won't patronize or belittle her by hiding the truth.

"But Eri, you have to understand; *it wasn't your fault.* It was *Chisaki* that did bad things with your quirk. It was *Chisaki* that hurt us. And we were there because we *wanted* to save you. You didn't do anything wrong. On the contrary, every time *you* used your quirk, you helped people. You returned my quirk to me so I could fight Chisaki. You saved Sir Nighteye's life. You helped me finally beat Chisaki. We're *all* alright, and that? That's thanks to you."

Izuku pauses. Eri's wide eyes are still doubtful but also cautiously hopeful, like she doesn't quite believe what Izuku is saying but desperately *wants* to.

"...I actually have a theory about quirks," Izuku tells her. "I think people's quirks and personalities mirror each other. For example, if you have a very... *explosive* personality, your quirk would be explosive too."

Eri brightens at Izuku's words.

"Oh! That makes sense then, since you're an angel and so is your quirk!"

Izuku sputters.

If it had been anyone else that called him that (most likely his teasing classmates) Izuku would have denied it vehemently. But Eri is looking up at him with so must earnest honesty that he can't find it in his heart to deny her.

"Er... uh, riiiiight... Anyway, what's important here isn't my quirk, but yours. I know it might seem frightening because Chisaki abused it and because you can't control it. But it's your quirk. It's a part of you. Sir Nighteye is proof, *I'm* proof that your quirk can be used for good, used to heal and help people. It's a *kind* quirk... just like you."

Eri bites her lower lip. Izuku gently squeezes her hands.

"I know—," his voice breaks, "I *know* it's hard to focus on the good part. But Eri, *it wasn't your fault.*"

The girl's eyes are watering now. Perhaps it's because she's finally hearing the words she wanted to hear. Perhaps it's because no one has ever said that to her. Perhaps it's because she's finally starting to believe it.

Izuku smiles up at her, soft and broken. Then he lets go of her hands and tentatively holds his arms apart.

He can tell that Eri isn't used to hugs. Izuku wasn't either. But he knows, now, just how much they can help.

So when Eri hesitates for a moment before all but throwing herself into his arms, he's ready. He catches her in his arms and cradles her against his chest as Eri sobs into his shirt.

Izuku knows this isn't nearly enough to undo or heal years of abuse.

But he hopes it's a step in the right direction.

*

Eri cries for a long time.

So does Izuku.

Not in front of her, of course. He stays with Eri until visiting hours are up, bids her goodbye and promises to return, thanks Aizawa for chaperoning him, returns to the dorms, goes into his room, shuts the door, and then he *cries*.

Izuku's first memories are those of Hisashi's violence. He's learned that it was wrong and that Hisashi was a bad person as he grew up, but for the longest time, that was just how the world *was*. And even when Izuku grew up, even when Hisashi was arrested, some deep part of him still blamed himself for making Inko cry. If only he didn't have his father's quirk. If only he wasn't so young. If only he wasn't so small. If only he wasn't so *weak*.

But then Eri came along, and when she blamed herself for the exact same things, Izuku was sincere when he told her it wasn't her fault.

Only then did he realize.

It wasn't *his* fault either.

Just like it was Chisaki that abused Eri and her quirk, it had been *Hisashi* who abused Inko and Izuku. Even though Eri felt like it was her quirk that caused everything, even though Izuku always blamed himself for being too weak, in the end, it was their abusers who were wrong, not them.

It wasn't Eri's fault.

It wasn't *Izuku's* fault.

It wasn't their fault.

Izuku cries for a long, long time. He hasn't cried this hard in years.

And as the tears wash down his cheeks, it feels like something he didn't even realize was stained is being cleansed.

It took years for him to realize it. It took telling Eri the very words he needed to hear himself to realize it. But now he knows, now he understands.

It wasn't his fault.

And for the first time since he can remember, Izuku feels like the weight on his back has lifted.

He feels like the scars covering his body have smoothed over.

He feels...

Free.

*

When Shouto knocks on Midoriya's door, the other boy doesn't open the door for him with a smile like usual.

"Midoriya?"

"It's unlocked," comes a muffled voice. It's unmistakably Midoriya's voice but it sounds slightly off, which worries Shouto.

When he opens the door and steps inside he finds that the room is dark. The lights are off and the drapes closed, only a sliver of sunlight peeking between the curtains and illuminating the room in a dim light. Shouto has to blink and let his eyes adjust before he finds Midoriya lying down on his bed, an arm thrown over his face.

When Midoriya peeks out to look at Shouto from under his forearm, Shouto finds that Midoriya's eyes are red.

"Light hurts," is the only thing he says, and now that he can hear it clearer Shouto recognizes that the other boy's voice is thick and cracked as if he's cried himself hoarse.

Shouto closes the door behind him, locks it on second thought to prevent any well-intentioned visitors from seeing Midoriya in this

state, then approaches. He kneels on the floor by Midoriya's head, summons a thin layer of ice on his hand, nudges Midoriya's arm away from his face and wordlessly lays his palm over his eyes.

Midoriya sighs in contentment as Shouto cools his red and puffed eyes. Shouto's eyes are drawn to the way Midoriya's lips part. With Midoriya's upper face covered with his own palm, his eyes can't help but drift down to the only part of his face uncovered. It would be so easy to lean down and...

"Thanks," Midoriya says, breaking Shouto's line of thought. Shouto straightens and shakes himself out of his musings.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asks carefully.

"...Yeah," Midoriya agrees after a beat. "Not right now, but... yeah. I want to tell you."

Shouto hums, pleased. He wouldn't have pushed if Midoriya said no, of course, but it warms something inside him that he easily said yes. At the trust and affection it implies.

Midoriya reaches up to draws Shouto hand down a bit, just enough that his eyes peek up at Shouto over his fingers.

"Can I ask for a favour?"

Shouto tries very hard not to be distracted by the way Midoriya's lips brush against his palm.

"Anything," he replies honestly instead.

Midoriya's red eyes crinkle at that, and even though his lips are hidden behind Shouto's hand he can tell he's smiling.

"There's somewhere I want... need to go," Midoriya confesses quietly. "I don't think I could do it on my own, and I'd *never* make my mother go with me, but... if it's with you, I think... I think I can face it. I know you go to see your mom on the weekends, but if you can spare some time after..."

"Of course. Where are we going?"

Midoriya's hand tightens around Shouto's. He takes a deep breath before answering softly.

"...My old house."

*

They take the train on Saturday.

It's a fairly long ride. Todoroki ends up falling asleep on Izuku's shoulder and he lets the other boy use him as a pillow. Izuku himself is too pensive to even doze off, after all, so he lets Todoroki rest until they have to get off the train.

They almost get lost a few times, but in the end, they find the house they're looking for. There's a faded 'For Sale' sign in the yard and Izuku's memory is a bit fuzzy, but it's unmistakably the house he lived in with Inko (*with Hisashi*) when he was young.

Izuku stares at it for a long, long moment.

Todoroki lays a gentle hand on Izuku's back. It's only then that he's able to shake himself out of his frozen inactivity and approach the front door.

It's locked.

He tries the doorknob a few more times but it only rattles futilely.

"Huh," Izuku blinks down at the locked door. "That's weird. When I called the real estate, they said I could look around. No one mentioned it being locked, though..."

"Maybe there's a key nearby?" Todoroki suggests.

They spend a few minutes searching under the doormat and inside the windowsills before Izuku gives up. He eyes the doorknob contemplatively.

"It's not exactly breaking and entering if we have permission, right?"

Todoroki's brows rise.

"An argument could be made for that," he says slowly, neither confirming nor denying, carefully neutral as if he isn't sure if he should be encouraging Izuku or not.

Izuku gives him a winning smile as he pulls out bobby pins from his

half-bun.

“We can call the real estate later and tell them what happened. But for now, keep watch so someone doesn’t report us or anything, will you?”

Todoroki doesn’t roll his eyes, but he does flick his gaze upwards for a moment.

“And here I thought we were training to be heroes, not budding villains.” But even as he jokes, he obediently turns to scan the street.

The door is opened within seconds. Izuku takes a deep breath, steels himself, and steps inside.

They changed the wallpaper.

It’s the first thing he notices. He can’t even remember what it used to be, but it certainly wasn’t the floral patterns printed on pale pink he sees now.

(He wonders if they couldn’t get the blood off the walls.)

It’s such a strange little detail to stick out to him that it throws him off for a moment. When Izuku doesn’t move from the doorway Todoroki steps up next to him, a solid line of heat and comfort, which helps Izuku find the resolve to slowly walk through their old house.

“...We used to have the TV here,” Izuku points out quietly when they come upon the living room. “Mom would sometimes borrow recordings of All Might from the video shop and I’d rewatch them for hours on end.”

A small smile curves Todoroki’s mouth as he gazes softly at the spot Izuku pointed, as if he can see a little Izuku watching starry-eyed and excited.

They continue on like that. Izuku leads them through the house, showing Todoroki what used to be his bedroom, sharing little anecdotes. Todoroki listens carefully, storing the stories in his memory like bottling a jar of sea glass.

(Izuku doesn’t even open the door to the master bedroom—*Hisashi’s* room—and Todoroki doesn’t ask.)

It barely takes them ten minutes to tour around the house. When they arrive back at the entrance hallway, Izuku hesitates before he

swallows thickly.

“There’s just one more place I need to check.”

He finally turns to the small door that he’d been purposefully ignoring.

Izuku opens the door to the broom cupboard. He crouches down and peers inside for a long moment.

“...It’s so much smaller than I remember it,” he eventually whispers quietly.

A hand gently lands on his shoulder. Izuku looks up to find Todoroki standing right behind him, and despite everything, he’s able to smile up at the other boy.

It really was a good idea to bring Todoroki with him.

Izuku takes a few breaths, then gently closes the door of the broom cupboard. (Though he *makes sure* it’s unlocked.) He stands up and stretches, eager to leave now that he has the closure he came here for.

“We’d better start heading back to the dorms,” Izuku says.

(And Shouto looks at him for a moment. He remembers the way Izuku called this place his old ‘house’ and not his ‘home’, because this place likely never *was* home for him. In that case...)

“Shall we return home?” he offers, his words unassuming but heavy with implication.

Izuku blinks. And then he laughs, light and free. He follows Todoroki outside the house and closes the door firmly shut behind him.

“Yeah. Let’s go home.”

+ Omake +

Izuku never realized that his fire has a tendency to manifest as wings until Uraraka pointed it out during the Sports Festival, though in

hindsight it seems fitting that his subconscious would mould his (father's) (no, not Hisashi's, *his*) fire into wings.

And so when he made it into his special move, it seemed only obvious, poetic even, to name it 'Icarus'.

Sometime in the future, when Izuku becomes a pro hero, a reporter will approach the hero Deku about his signature move.

"Why did you name your special move 'Icarus'? Didn't Icarus burn and fall?"

But that's the point.

It's because the story's been simmering in the back of Izuku's mind for so long. It's because Izuku relates to the young boy so much. It's because he knows what it feels like to try to desperately reach for the sun only to be denied by the very wings strapped to his back. It's because the myth is so intertwined with his charred past and his present nightmares. It's because despite all that, neither Icarus or Izuku will give up on trying to reach the sun.

Even if they burn their wings.

But Izuku can't exactly say that. So instead, he just smiles and tells them:

"True. But everyone seems to forget that before Icarus fell, he *flew*."

Chapter End Notes

Personally, I never thought of BYW as slowburn, but people keep calling it that in the comments?? So okay then, I guess this is a slowburn...? Sure, I'll tag that. ...But.

Buckle up, darlings, cause we're finally going full romance next chapter.

IZUKU HEADBANG

The Sum of Our Parts

Chapter Notes

※ Notice: My user name has been changed from oWhiteKiwibird to Crowbird (and Tumblr to crowbird-kamakse). More on that later.
That said, I don't know how you guys even found me without prior notice (or maybe Tumblr auto-redirects, I still dunno how all this works, sorry ;ω;) but we still got art! Thank you, sincerely, you are absolutely fantastic.

The Izu + Eri Icarus scene by ilovethesefictionalcharacters:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/190392110064/ilovethesefictionalcharacters-icarus-burn-your

"We call them suns" by deuynn:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/190487169364

Shigaraki the schoolgirl with a crush (submitted by anonymous):
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/615679248103063552/i-just-caught-up-w-burn-your-wings-the-lov

Izuku in a sunset backdrop by quailico:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/616375582005035008/quailico-fanart-for-crowbird-kamakse-s-burn

Burn Your Wings now has a Chinese translation! Thank you to BeMyselfHero for your work. You can find it here:
https://savemeandbemyhero.lofter.com/post/3122c86d_1c776a7cb

If you made something (art, memes, etc) but it hasn't been tagged in the ANs until now, please @ me on Tumblr with my new username or leave a comment with the address. You deserve to be Izuku Headbanged at.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind.

Inko knows this with crippling certainty.

For how could life be fair when her entire family died and left her stranded alone in this world before she even hit twenty? How could life be kind if the one person she thought was there for her turned out to be a violent, abusive, *bad* man?

Her son was the one good thing in Inko's life, and Inko couldn't even protect that. Pain is relative, and different people have different thresholds. So while the scorching flames and merciless blows of Hisashi's abuse forged Izuku into the hero he became (into the hero he was, is, and will be) for Inko... it made her *crumble*.

Inko never forgave herself for that.

But she cannot turn back the hands of time.

What she *can* do, though...

When Izuku tells her about Eri—about a child that has also been abused, about a girl that is still so kind despite everything, about someone who reminds Inko too much of her own boy, about someone who helped heal Inko's son—that night, Inko picks up the phone and makes a call.

"Hello, Eraserhead. This is Midoriya Inko. ...Yes. I'm calling because of Eri. I hear you're not sure what to do with her after she's discharged from the hospital?"

Inko cannot turn back the hands of time. She cannot take back the past and erase the fact that she failed her son.

But she *can* do *this*. She can help another abused child who had to learn to swallow tears at too young an age. She can help the girl who helped save her son (her *world*). She can do this for them. She can do this for him.

Life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind. But Inko can be. She can be fair, and she can be kind, for these children who've had to live a life that wasn't.

Inko takes a deep breath, stills her jittery hands, and speaks with as much firmness as she can muster.

“I have a proposal.”

*

Izuku had been determined to keep in touch with Eri even after she’s released from the hospital, of course. Theoretically, he knows that once you become a pro hero you can’t be personally involved with everyone you save, but Eri— Eri is special. She saved him as much as he saved her. He sees an unfair amount of himself in her. Not to mention that Eri still can’t bring herself to trust many people, and none of them as wholeheartedly as she does Izuku.

Suffice to say, they both have... an attachment, he supposes you could call it.

It’s not professional.

He doesn’t care.

So when the police found out that she isn’t actually Chisaki’s daughter from Togata and members of the Shie Hassaikai and it turned out Eri was most likely going to have to be sent to a facility of some sort, Izuku had been ready to fight for his right to stay in Eri’s life.

He never expected his mother to step in and do it for him.

Izuku isn’t fully aware of the details, but Midoriya Inko apparently offered to take Eri in. And caused a lot of paperwork. For a lot of people.

See, Eri’s case isn’t as simple as offering to look after just any orphan. Eri has ties to the Yakuza, and more importantly, her quirk has already proved dangerous in the wrong hands and when out of control. She needs to be protected, both herself from others and others from her.

Inko argued that’s why she’d be perfect to take care of Eri. The pro heroes and police are already keeping a close eye on Inko since villains might target Izuku through her, so adding one little girl to watch over won’t be too much of a hassle. Their home is close enough to UA that Aizawa can easily come by if Eri ever ends up losing control of her quirk again, and it’d be better for Eri to have someone

who can concentrate on her instead of, for example, staying at UA and having various teachers try to make time for her during their busy schedule. Not to mention that it would probably help Eri's mental stability to be close to Izuku, who she's latched onto like a koala with separation anxiety even if she's too timid to openly show it.

This was the point where the paperwork came in. They even brought in Monoma once to have him copy Eri's quirk in an attempt to understand it better to make sure Inko wouldn't be at risk of being rewound out of existence. Thankfully Monoma determined that her quirk was the type that had to be recharged, in a sense, and that her shrunken horn indicates she's 'spent' and isn't in danger of losing control at the moment.

Izuku had been awed and almost dazed throughout the proceedings. Inko was never someone to step up and draw attention to herself or stir up trouble, but she willingly brewed up this storm of paperwork and calmly saw it through, albeit with slightly trembling hands. And Izuku knows that she didn't do it just out of the goodness of her heart, but that she did it for *him*.

It humbles him and gratifies him that she'd reach so far out of her comfort zone for them.

Eventually, all the paperwork was settled, especially with Aizawa backing Inko.

And so they finally got the green light to have Eri live at Izuku's place.

It's... almost surreal. Izuku would still spend most of his time at the dorms until he graduates, of course, but Eri will be living at his house and he can go visit her on the weekends like Todoroki visits his mother.

He only hopes both Inko and Eri aren't pushing themselves for his sake.

He tries not to let his concern show as he waits for Inko with Eri at the hospital. Inko will be coming to meet Eri for the first time, and the girl's been nervous enough that Izuku doesn't need to add to that by showing how nervous *he* is.

"Hey," Izuku says softly as he takes Eri's hand. She's still hesitant to initiate physical contact, but just as All Might, Aizawa, Todoroki and the rest of Class 1-A did for him, Izuku is hoping to gently break her out of the habit. "Remember, you can say no if you want to. If you

meet her today and don't feel okay, then you can say no. Promise me you won't force yourself, please?"

Eri's eyes are wide as she looks up at him and unconsciously squeezes his hand.

"But," the girl swallows thickly, then whispers. "What if *she* doesn't like *me*?"

Her voice is small and frail, like a flower wilting against the cold. The slight fear and preemptive resignation are so *familiar* that it guts Izuku. But he does his best to ignore how much the invisible scars Chisaki left on Eri pains him in favour of reassuring her.

"Eri, if I know my mom—and I *should* since she's, you know, *my mom*—," Eri doesn't quite giggle at Izuku's purposefully joking tone, but her expression does brighten as her eyes shine. Izuku grins at her and squeezes her hand. "She'll love you."

They don't get to say much more as Aizawa comes in and raps his knuckles on the doorframe.

"She's here."

Eri shoots Izuku a wide-eyed look, squeezes his hand, and they step forward together.

They find Inko waiting for them in a private visiting room painted with warm colours and has sofas and chairs arranged around a coffee table. Inko is sitting quietly and Izuku knows his mother well enough to sense her nerves from the way she's wrangling her handkerchief in her plump hands. She stands when she sees them, shooting Izuku a smile before turning her eyes to Eri. Her gaze softens.

"Hello. I'm Midoriya Inko, Izuku's mother. You must be Eri-chan?"

Eri nods mutely, eyes wide.

"It's wonderful to meet you, Eri-chan."

Eri just stares up at Inko with wide eyes.

But before Izuku can try to bridge the silence, he feels a soft tug on his pant legs. When he crouches down for her Eri puts a hand to his ear as she whispers (though he's pretty sure Inko and Aizawa can both still hear her).

“She has the same bunny ears as you,” Eri whispers in a vaguely awed voice.

And just— what?

Bunny ears?

Izuku is so thrown and confused for a moment when he looks at his mom and—

Oh.

Oh.

Back when Izuku had entered middle school, he’d grown out his hair and purposefully mimicked his mother’s hairstyle and pulled his hair in a half-bun with strands of hair framing his face. His hairstyle is almost exactly like Inko’s, just curlier and minus her bangs.

And apparently it makes him look like a lop-eared rabbit, according to his classmates who keep shoving pictures of said rabbit in his face and insisting they’re a spitting image.

(Which they’re *not*, okay?)

If it was anyone else who was calling him a bunny, Izuku would have given them the evil eye and denied it with righteous fury. But since it’s Eri, well. Eri can do nothing wrong.

And the fact that *this* is what she’s so transfixed on after meeting his mom for the first time is just, well, it’s just downright *adorable*, isn’t it?

Inko seems to agree as when Izuku meets her eyes, they’re shining with shared mirth. Not to mention that Aizawa is making a muffled coughing noise that sounds suspiciously like a stifled laugh.

Izuku bites back a smile and stage-whispers back to Eri.

“If you ask, I’m sure Mom will tie your hair the same way too.”

Eri’s eyes widen and all but sparkle in awe at that, her red eyes shining with more excitement than nervousness now.

Things take off after that. Inko makes small talk while Izuku makes tea and Eri sips from a juice box. Aizawa sits quietly in a corner of the room, supervising while trying not to encroach on their soon-to-be-

family meeting.

Eri relaxes enough to let go of Izuku's hand after a few minutes. One juice box and three cookies later, she warms up to Inko enough to shyly ask the woman if she could please put up her hair in the same style as Inko and Izuku and, to quote, "give her bunny ears too."

Izuku refills Aizawa's tea as he watches Inko combing Eri's white hair as she tells the girl fairy tales in a soft voice and Eri listens with flushed cheeks and starry eyes.

"They'll be fine," Aizawa comments quietly into his tea.

Izuku blinks, then smiles.

"Yes," he agrees.

Both Inko and Eri will be good for each other.

He can't express how happy he is for all of them.

Fifteen minutes later, though, Izuku has to clasp a hand over his mouth to hold in the snickers threatening to break out.

He really doesn't understand her thought process, but somehow Eri has decided that she needs to practice how to make the "bunny ears hairstyle" herself. Seeing as Aizawa was the only one in the room who didn't already have their hair in a half-bun, she shyly asked the pro hero if she could practice with his hair.

Izuku had been so proud of Eri that she's come out of her shell enough to ask a favour like that, and that she actually got Aizawa of all people to agree. It turns out even the stoic pro hero isn't immune to Eri's wide puppy-dog eyes.

But Inko didn't have any more spare ribbons or pins so Izuku had asked a passing nurse if she had any, and the nurse gladly lent them one of her own ribbons.

A long, wide, ribbon coloured a brilliant shade of pink.

Pink.

It even has sequins.

And now here they are, Inko coaching Eri as the girl tries to wrestle Aizawa's mane of hair into a bun, tangling his hair with that glorious pink ribbon, the sequins sparkling brightly in contrast to Aizawa's dark expression. Aizawa is sitting there looking like he's questioning his life choices and having a war flashback.

It's adorable.

It's heartwarming.

It's downright hilarious.

Of course, Izuku, being a proud member of Class 1-A, snaps a photo of them.

And then he uploads it on the group chat.

[Midoriya: I humbly present to you my submission for the 'best photo' contest.]

[Midoriya: (image)]

The *Class 1-A Chat Room for Emergencies* (yeah, it may have gotten to the point where even Iida had given up all pretense that the first chat room is anything but a meme/general purpose chat room anymore, but they still haven't gotten around to changing the name to something more appropriate) to put it lightly, *blows up.*

[Ashido: omg]

[Kaminari: WTF?!??!!!!]

[Sero: is... is that really aizawa sensei with a pink ribbon?]

[Hagakure: awwwww!!♡♡♥♥]

[Sero: OUR aizawa sensei???? with a PINK RIBBON???????]

[Asui: I think we found proof that Bunny-ness is infectious, ribbit]

[Shoji: THE BUNNIES HAVE MULTIPLIED]

[Ashido: omg]

[Kouda: !!]

[Kouda: (image)]

[Sato: eyy, youre right kouda, they look exactly like your pet rabbit!]

[Iida: Who even is the child?]

[Asui: thats Eri chan]

[Iida: Ah, I see!]

[Kaminari: she deserves a fucking medal]

[Iida: Kaminari! Language!]

[Ashido: omg]

[Sero: (gif)]

[Sero: (gif)]

[Jiro: (gif)]

[Aoyama: Très bien☆]

[Uraraka: this is it, I can die happy now... thank you everyone....]

[Ashido: OMG]

[Ashido: wait no dont die yet ochako, think of the children! ... I mean the memes!]

[Sero: f in the chat for uraraka]

[Shoji: F]

[Ojiro: f]

[Tokoyami: F.]

[Sato: f]

[Kirishima: BRO]

[Kirishima: MIDORIYA]

[Kirishima: MY MAN]

[Kirishima: I THINK YOU JUST WON THE COMPETITION]

Izuku smiles smugly as the chat goes up rapidly.

Yeah. He'd say he won too.

*

A few days pass uneventfully.

(Well, Class 1-A did go through a stint where some of their classmates with longer hair would tie it in a half-bun and sidebangs in 'the official Midoriya-bunny-hairstyle' as they've come to call it and go around saying "Same hat?" "Same hat!" every time they saw Izuku or Aizawa while the others roared in laughter, but Izuku is *not* going to acknowledge that. Even if it became their second most-used in-class joke, right after "I won't let you down." Nope.)

The school Culture Festival comes up, and though Izuku and the other interns can't participate as much in the planning due to the remedial classes they have to take, it's still nice to have something so normal and see everyone genuinely excited.

"We're back!" Kirishima announces when the interns return from yet another late night remedial class.

"Welcome!" Iida waves them over to the common room where most of their classmates are sprawled in various positions.

"Did you guys finally settle on what to do at the Festival?" Izuku asks as he catches sight of Iida's notebook and what looks like the beginnings of a plan of some sort.

"Yeah!" Ashido jumps up excitedly. "We're gonna have a dance club with live performance, so everyone can join in the fun! Isn't it great?! Todoroki came up with the idea!"

And just, what?

Izuku turns to look at Todoroki with an incredulous look.

"*You* proposed a *dance club?*" he asks in a bewildered tone.

Todoroki cocks his head. "Yes?"

"...Who are you and what have you done with Todoroki?"

The corners of other boy's eyes crinkle slightly and his lips twitch. That familiar ever-so-subtle almost-a-smile proves that it is indeed Todoroki and not Toga in disguise, but Izuku is still baffled that Todoroki was the one to suggest this. Not that it isn't a great idea, but it's just so... random, coming from the quiet boy.

"I just combined Ashido's idea with what we did in the license exam remedial training," Todoroki explains with a shrug, and Izuku can't even begin to imagine what kind of training Todoroki and Bakugo must have done to come up with this.

He snorts and shakes his head.

"Well, it does sound like a really good idea. I won't be able to help much tomorrow, though."

"Huh? But why?! Tomorrow's a Saturday!" Ashido wails.

"He's going home tomorrow," Todoroki answers instead, and no one in Class 1-A bats an eye at that, as if it's perfectly normal for the other boy to know Izuku's schedule inside out.

"I'm taking Togata-senpai to see Eri," Izuku himself just adds with a grin.

"Oh! Is that tomorrow?" Uraraka claps her hands. "Wait for a sec!"

She runs upstairs before quickly returning with a small paper bag in her hands.

"Here," she says, handing it over to Izuku. Izuku peers inside to find an assortment of ribbons, hair ties, pins and such. "It's from us. All the girls donated a few things and commissioned a few specific ones from Yaomomo! Would you give them to Eri for us?"

Izuku's heart melts.

"Of course. Thank you, all of you."

The girls grin brightly at him.

The next day Izuku brings Togata and Aizawa to his house and Eri's eyes shine like stars when Izuku presents her with the gifts. Her bright expression brings smiles to everyone's faces, though when Eri holds up a ribbon and looks around expectantly, Aizawa seems to subtly shrink away while Togata enthusiastically volunteers to be her training dummy.

Togata's hair is far too short to really do anything, but Eri isn't deterred and she starts tying the ribbons into knots and bows around Togata's face until he starts looking like an over-zealously gift-wrapped head. Izuku snickers as he snaps a photo, making a mental note to ask Kirishima for Amajiki's number so he can send the senior the photo.

Izuku takes the chance when Eri is distracted by her work and Togata's chattering to approach Inko and ask her quietly.

"...She still hasn't smiled yet?" he asks softly enough that it won't carry.

Inko's doting smile falls from her face, her expression enough of an answer in itself.

Eri hasn't smiled once in all the time Izuku—any of them, really—have known her. Her expression may brighten, and her eyes might shine, but she never truly *smiles*. Even when she received the presents from the girls of 1-A, Eri had been visibly grateful and excited but she hadn't quite managed to curve her lips into a smile.

As if she's forgotten how to.

Even though Chisaki is arrested, even though the man will never lay sight on her again, *Izuku won't let him*, the fact remains that he still stains Eri's memories and haunts her dreams.

Izuku himself has never suffered the inability to smile, but he knows how it feels to be shackled to a phantom.

He also knows another person who had to relearn how to smile. He traces the curve of Todoroki's barely-there smile in his mind, marvelling at how familiar and easier it has become, when inspiration hits him.

"The Culture Festival!" Izuku blurts out. Everyone turns to him at his

outburst, but Izuku looks at Aizawa. “I know you said visitors aren’t allowed this year, but would it be possible for Eri to come?”

Aizawa hums lightly, not rejecting it immediately. The hero too knows how Eri is yet to smile, so he probably knows where Izuku is going with this.

“We’ll have to run it by the Principal and the committee, but it’ll probably be alright.”

Togata perks up, the various coloured ribbons fluttering and shaking around his head at the sudden movement like a waterfall of rainbows.

“Oh! Then I can chaperone Eri-chan if Midoriya-san can’t come!”

Eri seems a little nervous at the thought of going to such an unfamiliar and densely crowded place, but between the promise of being able to see Izuku dance on stage and Togata’s enthusiastic persuading, she seems to be looking forward to it by the end of the visit.

When it’s time for the students and Aizawa to leave, Inko and Eri come to the front door to greet them. Inko crouches down to Eri and smiles.

“Remember what we talked about?”

The males, of course, have no idea what this is about, but Eri nods determinedly at Inko’s words.

Izuku watches in confusion as the girl comes up to him. Eri fiddles a bit with her fingers, shy and adorable, as she explains.

“Inko-san said that since she’s taking care of me, we’re like siblings. Which means you’re my older brother. So...”

And oh, Izuku thinks he knows where this is going. Izuku doesn’t think he even has a little sister fantasy, but when Eri looks up at him with wide eyes and flushed cheeks, his heart does a funny little dance before it just outright melts in his ribcage.

“Can I call you nii-chan?”

Izuku is pretty sure Eri can conquer the world with the way she shyly looks up through her lashes.

“Of course,” he manages to smile and answer before Eri’s eyes brighten and she destroys what little brain function he has left.

“Thank you, Izu-nii!”

And just. Izuku is dead. From cuteness overload. Put it on his gravestone. No regrets.

Togata might or might not be snortling while filming them with his phone, but Izuku is a little shellshocked even later as the three of them leave the Midoriya residence.

“What is this feeling?” Izuku murmurs in a still-dazed voice to no one in particular. “She’s already living with us, but I still want to wrap her in bubble wrap and kidnap her...!”

Togata chokes on a noise that sounds like a dying cat while Aizawa gives Izuku a blandly indulgent smile and pats his shoulder.

“Kidnapping is a crime. Don’t do that. Only villains do that.”

*

Todoroki, on the other hand, just blinks slowly and tilts his head when he hears the news.

“...Congratulations?” he says in what’s almost a question.

Todoroki himself is trying to reconnect with his siblings recently, Izuku knows, but it’s still different from Izuku’s case. Todoroki had been actively forbidden from interacting with his other siblings when he was younger, and by the time he’d grown enough of a backbone to give Endeavor the rhetorical middle finger and defy the man, the siblings had grown too distant and awkward with each other. But ever since the Sports Festival, they’ve been visiting their mother together at the hospital and interacting more.

The Todoroki siblings may have been distant, by force and later habit, but they’ve always been there.

Izuku, on the other hand, finds even the concept of siblings foreign.

And look, Izuku is glad that Eri is living with them, okay? But Eri calling him *nii-chan* hit home that she isn’t just living with them, but that he has a little sister now. And that... that hits differently, for some reason.

As one abuse victim to another, Izuku has always wanted to help Eri get better. But as an *older brother* to his *little sister*, well. That's... that's different. It feels like it should be different.

Don't get him wrong, Izuku would have done his best to help Eri regardless of the situation. But Eri becoming his *little sister* makes things that much more...

Personal.

Take their scars, for example.

Eri's arms had been covered in bandages while she was with Chisaki and at the hospital. Once she went home with Inko, she had quietly asked for clothes with long sleeves.

Just like Izuku.

Not only does it break Izuku's heart, but if this is what Izuku feels like, he can't imagine what his mother might be going through when both her children insist on covering their scars. Izuku now knows that hiding things from Inko might have hurt her more, but he'd be a hypocrite to say something to Eri when he's doing the exact same thing.

It's unfair how much of himself he sees in Eri.

See, the thing is, Hisashi certainly left scars. But Izuku has always been of the opinion that even if scars don't heal, they still fade.

And if they don't fade either, well. You can always cover them up.

But now that he has a little sister, now that he sees himself in Eri, Izuku doesn't want her to do the same thing he's been doing all his life. Not that she needs to bare her scars if she doesn't want to, but he wants her to know that she doesn't have to cover them either. She should be able to choose to do what she wants without having to consider how it might affect other people.

And as a big brother, that means leading by example.

"...I'm going to have to take my shirt off," Izuku mumbles.

Todoroki chokes.

"*What?*"

Izuku blinks. He hadn't meant to say that out loud.

"It's nothing," he says, but Todoroki is looking at him like it very much *isn't* nothing.

Izuku doesn't get why. It's not like Todoroki hasn't seen him shirtless before.

And... come to think of it, Todoroki is the only person Izuku has willingly let see his bare skin in an entire decade.

Huh.

"Anyways," Izuku shakes his head. They're hanging out in Todoroki's room after coming back from meeting Eri, and he was in the middle of telling the other boy about the trip. "So yeah, Eri might be coming to see the Festival. I hope it helps her."

"...It will," Todoroki says after a moment. "Maybe she won't be able to smile right away. But it will be good for her."

And that, coming from someone who's relearned how to smile, means a lot.

Izuku smiles at Todoroki.

"You know, it's actually thanks to you."

"Hm?"

"I got the idea to invite Eri while I was thinking about you. About your smile," Izuku clarifies, and for some reason Todoroki's pale skin flushes bright red. His mismatched eyes are blown wide for a moment before he drops his face into his palms with a familiar groan.

"How... how do you keep saying things like that? With such a straight face?!"

Todoroki sighs.

"It's not fair how much I love you."

Izuku is about to quip back with familiar banter, except this *isn't* familiar, and he pauses with a teasing comeback frozen on the tip of his tongue because—

What?

...Love?

"...What did you say?" Izuku barely manages to choke out.

He waits for Todoroki to continue the joke, or clarify the punchline, or, or *something* that will untangle the mess Izuku's thoughts have been jumbled into. But Todoroki just raises his head and gives him a confused look

"It's not fair how much I love you?" Todoroki repeats, as if he doesn't get why that sentence scrambled Izuku's higher brain function.

Izuku doesn't know what expression his face made, but Todoroki's eyes widen.

"I love you," he states slowly. "You know that. ...Right?"

Izuku just stares for a full five seconds. And then—

"I what?"

A few more seconds pass, and then the full sentence registers.

"You *what?!*"

*

Shouto feels almost as shocked as Midoriya looks.

"You... you didn't know? ...How could you *not* know?"

Shouto may be socially inept and unfamiliar with social norms, but even he knows he wasn't exactly subtle.

But clearly Midoriya's obliviousness far outdoes Shouto's social awkwardness.

"How could I?!" Midoriya almost shrieks. "How could *you?!*"

It's not quite an accusation, but it's certainly close. Shouto might have felt a little hurt if it wasn't for how utterly *lost* Midoriya looks. He can't understand how or why Midoriya finds it so incomprehensible that Shouto loves him.

And even as rattled and shaken as he is, Midoriya still quickly tries to calm down and assure Shouto.

“Sorry,” the other boy mumbles as he presses the heels of his palms into his eyes. (Shouto mourns that it hides Midoriya’s face, but he wisely holds his tongue. If this is how Midoriya reacts from Shouto just telling him he loves him, he can’t begin to imagine what’ll happen if he voices every passing wistful thought.)

“I’m overreacting, I know, I just... it’s... I dunno. I never...” Midoriya sighs harshly, a strong gust of breath escaping through his clenched teeth.

“It doesn’t have to be a confession,” Shouto says quickly. “I didn’t mean it to be a confession. You can just ignore it and pretend this never happened.”

“I can just— what?! I can’t ignore your feelings like that!”

But Shouto would rather his feelings be ignored than have Midoriya so distressed.

Midoriya makes a strangled sound, dragging his hand over his face.

“Sorry,” he says again, and Shouto doesn’t know why he keeps apologizing. He wishes he’d stop. “Can I... Can I have some time?”

The note in his voice is almost a plea, and Shouto is nodding even before Midoriya finishes his sentence.

“Of course. I didn’t mean to discomfort you with my feelings.”

Shouto unthinkingly reaches out a hand to Midoriya but stops before he can touch the other boy. He... probably shouldn’t, and that hurts more than he was expecting. He lets his hand drop limply to his side.

Midoriya’s eyes follow the trajectory of his hand, lingering on it for a moment.

Then he turns around without another word.

And he leaves without a backward glance.

The door closes shut behind Midoriya, leaving Shouto alone in his room that suddenly feels too large and empty.

Shouto stumbles to his futon and sits down hard.

He really hadn't meant to confess to Midoriya. Even as he casually said it was unfair how much he loved Midoriya, it wasn't meant to be an actual confession as much as it was just a statement. Partly because he didn't want to pressure the other boy, and partly because he assumed that Midoriya already knew his feelings. How could he not, when Shouto couldn't restrain himself and let his emotions spill over for the whole world to see?

But Midoriya had been shaken at his admission. Not just surprised, not just shocked, but visibly *shaken*.

For the first time since they'd become friends, things had become awkward between them.

...Shouto isn't usually one to swear. But tonight, he's going to have to take a page out of Bakugo's book.

"*Shit.*"

*

"*Shit.*"

The swear word slips out of Izuku mouth without conscious thought. He had stumbled out of Todoroki's room last night, paced in his own room for a while before realizing that Todoroki was only a few feet away since they're next doors, had a minor breakdown, and spent the night fitfully with little sleep. He'd avoided everyone when he woke the next day—thank goodness it's a Sunday—and now he's fled to the laundry room just to have something to do and hopefully take his mind off of... everything. And of course, in his rattled state, he had started the machine without putting in any detergent.

He isn't even sure why he's so shaken. Izuku's not homophobic—he's heard it used to be a thing, back before the quirk society when people were discriminated by skin colour and such—it's just that... he never even thought about... he just doesn't...

Izuku stares blankly at the clothes whirling around in the detergent-free water, then adds "Fuck," as if an afterthought. He's not sure if he's swearing because of his poor waterlogged laundry or what happened in Todoroki's room.

"...Deku?"

Izuku turns to find Uraraka looking at him with raised brows and a laundry basket in her arms.

"We didn't see you at breakfast," she says, setting the basket down and pulling out the detergent that autopilot-Izuku had forgotten. "Or lunch, or dinner. And you don't usually swear at school. Are you alright? Did something happen?"

He could just tell her that everything's fine. (Which is a familiar lie.) He could say that he forgot to put in detergent. (Which is true, but isn't the truth.) Or he could say—

"Todoroki said he loves me," Izuku blurts out. And then he slaps his palm over his mouth, horrified.

Uraraka also covers her mouth with her hand, but unlike Izuku, she's grinning brightly with shining eyes.

"Ohhhh, it finally happened! When? Where? How?! I'm your best girl friend, I'm entitled to gossip! Give me all the juicy details!" the girl almost squeals in excitement, jumping up and down and accidentally floating herself a few feet.

Izuku just stares in bewilderment. The moment Uraraka takes a good look at Izuku's face, she immediately sobers.

"Oh no. That's not a good expression. What went wrong?"

Izuku opens his mouth, closes it, and then gives in. Uraraka *is* his best girl friend, and he *really* needs help right now.

"It's... complicated."

Uraraka searches his face for a long moment before nodding decisively.

"Alright. Let's talk this through."

Izuku is *so grateful* to be blessed with Uraraka Ochako.

The first roadblock they run into is finding a private place to talk. The two of them can't go into each other's rooms alone and all the common rooms or public areas have people in them, especially since it's the weekend. In the end, Uraraka uses her zero gravity and Izuku uses his *pull* so they can crawl out the window and sit on the roof for

privacy.

"...So we were talking last night, and he just— he just *says it*, so naturally, so casually, and I just— I can't— I never even—!"

He's rambling, Izuku knows, but he can't help himself. His hands fret and his foot taps against the shingles, his sentences and thoughts disjointed and broken. Uraraka helps him work through his confusion, listening to his ramblings in the sunset, her initial excitement replaced by genuine worry.

Once Izuku calms down a bit, he bites his lip and lowers his voice.

"And... does he really?"

His voice is almost a whisper, but Uraraka can hear him with no problem.

"I mean, I don't mean any offence. But. Does he really... *love*, me?" Izuku stares out at the setting sun. "What if it's just, I don't know, some kind of... imprinting, because I was the first person to reach out to him? And he's just confusing that for... for love?"

It's a genuine concern. But Uraraka gives him an odd smile.

"Deku... You can only say that because you couldn't see him when you were kidnapped."

Izuku stills. Uraraka continues, that odd smile on her face, her voice gentle.

"We were all devastated, of course. Iida didn't get any sleep during those three days and Bakugo called Yaomomo by her name just for a *chance* to find you. But Todoroki... without you, he almost looked *dead.*"

"..."

"You broke him a little when you pushed him away that day. I'm sure he would have gladly fought to save you or even willingly went with you, but you didn't even give him a choice. You just pushed him away. And we all know you did what you thought was the best for him. But Deku... you have to understand. Without you, Todoroki will *break.*"

"..."

“He can’t live without you. He’s a different person around you. He’s changed because of and for you. He’s so much more honest, brighter, softer, *better* with you. Can you still say that’s not love?”

Uraraka breaks it into him gently, but Izuku is still silent. The girl watches him for a long moment before seeming to realize something.

“…This isn’t just about Todoroki, is it?” Uraraka sighs. “You’re not just worried that Todoroki is confused. There’s something *you* have a problem with too.”

The girl purses her lips and thinks for a moment before she pulls out her phone.

“Give me a sec,” she says as she scrolls down her contacts list. “I’m gonna make the executive decision to call in reinforcement. Are you okay with that, Deku?”

When Izuku nods hesitantly, Uraraka beams at him and hits the call button.

“Hello? Hey, I need you to come up to the roof right now! Yup, roof, right now. …Oh, you’d better come, or I’ll upload those photos on the group chat. You know I’ll do it.”

Izuku thinks he vaguely hears loud cussing on the other end, but Uraraka just smiles brightly and sing-songs into her phone.

“See you soon!” she says cheerfully, and then cuts off the call just as an explosive round of swear words filter through the other end.

“I called back-up,” the girl explains when she catches Izuku’s bewildered look. “If it’s *you* that has a problem, then I think we need someone who knows you better to help.”

And before Izuku can say anything about that, a window nearby *slams* open and none other than Bakugo Katsuki flies out onto the roof with a *boom*.

“What. The. Fuck.” he snarls with a murderous expression, but Uraraka only waves cheerfully at him.

“Hey, Bakugo! Todoroki confessed to Deku and Deku’s going through an existential crisis, help him work through it like a good childhood friend, okay? Okay. Bye~!”

And then the girl floats herself to crawl back inside through the window, leaving Izuku and Bakugo shellshocked in the wake of the bombshell she dropped on them.

Really?

And see, Bakugo Katsuki is not one to run away from anything.

But when Bakugo looks at Izuku, realizes he's being asked to give advice on *romance* and talk about—god forbid—*feelings*, he starts backing up with an almost panicked expression on his face.

"Oh no. No you don't. I am *so* not the person for this. I am so *not* the person for this."

Normally, Izuku would agree. Talking about something like this with Uraraka is one thing, but Bakugo?

Then again, desperate times call for desperate measures, and there must be a reason Uraraka called Bakugo of all people. So Izuku gives his childhood friend a weak smile.

"Please?"

Bakugo puts a hand over his eyes and his lips move silently in what looks like *so not the person for this* before he sighs and walks over to plop down next to Izuku. He leans back on his hands in a careless sprawl, stubbornly not looking at Izuku, but still sitting side by side.

"What the fuck is the problem?" he grumbles lowly, but Izuku knows Bakugo well enough to know he wouldn't be here at all if he didn't genuinely care. The unspoken concern in this small gesture warms him and gives him the courage to try to articulate his problem.

"I... I wasn't sure if Todoroki actually loves me. Uraraka says he does, but now I... I don't know how *I* feel about... this."

At this admission, though, Bakugo looks over at Izuku like he's grown a second head. Or lost his existing head.

"Seriously? I already knew you're an idiot, but this is just pathetic, Deku. The fuck do you mean you don't know, you two already act like a married old couple."

His characteristically unflinchingly crass and straightforward way of speaking makes Izuku blink rapidly.

"...We do?"

Bakugo sighs as if this conversation physically pains him. And then he starts listing things with a curled lip, looking really awkward, really reluctant, and really uncomfortable.

"You guys have like, what, pet names and shit that only you use. You have inside jokes, you always move around each other or save spots, you know each other's schedules. You cover for each other. Yeah, nice try, don't think I didn't notice. Oh, and not to mention all the stuff you do in the kitchen," Bakugo grumbles with a grimace, as if even saying the words leaves a tooth-rottingly sweet aftertaste in his mouth.

"It's gross. I'd say get a room, but you practically live in each other's rooms already. Like I said. Married old couple. I don't get how you can *not* know."

Izuku is speechless that Bakugo knows so much. It's either he's just that observant—possible, considering how smart he is under that temper—or that they were just that obvious—probable, considering how completely oblivious at least Izuku has been.

And Bakugo's words make Izuku think about other things too in a new light. He thinks about the hand-holding, about sharing lives and secrets, how they support and comfort each other, how they instantly turn to each other, and that hug. That *hug*.

"Oh my god," Izuku says faintly. "Have we been dating? Have we been dating *and I didn't know?!*"

His voice rises, panicky and shrill.

"What the fuck, don't ask me!" Bakugo yelps too, his face stained red either because of embarrassment or the sunset. It's hard to tell.

Bakugo slaps his palm over his eyes with a pained groan. "I am *so* not the person for this. You know what, that's it, I'm done, I'm outta here. And I'm gonna forget this conversation ever happened. You'd better too."

With that he stands up and starts making his way off the roof. But for all his gruffness, Izuku knows how out of his comfort zone, how out of depth Bakugo was, and he's touched that the other boy still stuck around this long and tried his best to help.

“Thanks, Kacchan,” he calls out to Bakugo’s retreating back. His childhood friend pauses for a moment before replying.

“...Don’t mention it. ...No, really, ***don’t*** *mention it.* ***Ever****.*”

Izuku bites back a grin and watches him leave. For all their differences and problems, Bakugo Katsuki really is the friend who saw him the longest and knows him the best.

It’s funny that it’s Uraraka and Bakugo, the two people who consistently call him ‘Deku’, who were the ones to help him work through this.

Izuku stays seated on the roof a bit more, watching the sun set entirely, before he pulls out his phone. He takes a deep breath. And then he sends a message to Todoroki.

*

[Can we talk?]

The fact that Midoriya sent a text reminds Shouto of the widened distance between them. Before, he would have just knocked on Shouto’s door without bothering to ask, certain of his welcome.

This isn’t what Shouto wanted. If he knew his feelings would have created such a gap, he would have never uttered his feelings, even if he thought Midoriya already knew them.

He bites the inside of his mouth as he types his reply.

[Of course.]

[Your room or mine?]

His question is answered with a knock on his door.

Shouto opens it to find Midoriya standing there, his phone in hand, a nervous expression of his face.

“Hi. Can I, um...”

And the way he’s so uncertain and hesitant, as if he thinks Shouto may refuse his entry, makes Shouto’s heart squeeze painfully.

“Please,” he says, and the word comes out more like a plea than he’d intended. Shouto clears his throat, stepping to the side and inviting Midoriya in.

“Right,” Midoriya murmurs under his breath as if steeling himself once the door is closed behind him. “I’m sorry for bailing on you yesterday. I just, I was... I never even thought about—,” he pauses, takes a deep breath, and starts again.

“First of all. I don’t mean any offence, but... are you sure that you... that you actually...”

He can’t seem to say the word to Shouto’s face, so Shouto says it for him.

“That I love you?”

Midoriya’s cheeks flush, and Shouto stares in slight fascination. Usually it’s the other way around, with Shouto’s cheeks burning at Midoriya’s nonchalant words.

“I mean,” Midoriya pushes on. “You... haven’t had many friends. So what if you’re just... confused?”

Shouto stares. And then he sighs wryly.

“I’ll be the first to admit I’m not the best with social norms. But even I know it’s not ‘just friends’ when you want to kiss someone.”

“Ki—?!” Midoriya’s eyes fly wide open, his face turning a brighter red, before he adverts his gaze.

Shouto is torn between being disappointed at further proof that Midoriya really never even thought about this and melting at just how adorable he is.

Shouto thinks he fell in love in one sense or another the moment Midoriya first smiled at him, burst into angelic flames, and called him *Shouto*. It had only been a matter of time for that love to turn

romantic, but he had realized the nature of his feelings when Midoriya had been kidnapped at the summer training camp.

That night, he realized the answer to the question "*what would I do without you.*"

"You're the one who always jokes that I'm spoiling you rotten so you won't be able to manage without me anymore," Shouto says with a small, resigned smile. "But in truth, it's the other way around. *I* can't do without you."

He looks Midoriya in the eye.

"I *can't.*"

It's as much of a confession as repeating the words *I love you*, and Midoriya swallows thickly. The message is loud and clear in the mere handful of words Shouto uttered, dripping with intent and heavy with intensity.

"Right," Midoriya stammers. "I... sorry. I needed to make sure."

"...You know how I feel," Shouto says quietly. "What about you?"

A long silence follows his question.

"My parents weren't married," Midoriya says with averted eyes, seemingly out of the blue. But Shouto listens attentively because he senses this isn't an attempt to change the subject but is related to the answer to his question.

(Nevermind that he'd always focus on Midoriya's words regardless of the situation.)

"I can't say for certain why my mom stayed with— with him. Maybe she was too scared, maybe she was too used to it, maybe she didn't have a choice, or maybe it was all of that and more. But the reason she first began living with him was because she loved him."

Midoriya looks at Shouto imploringly.

"She *loved* him."

And, oh. Shouto now understands why Midoriya was so distraught and why he was so blindsided by Shouto's confession of love.

The problem isn't that Midorya is just oblivious, or because he has

self-esteem issues, or even that he isn't interested in romance.

It's that in truth, Midoriya is absolutely *traumatized* by love.

Midoriya frets and stresses, biting his lower lip and wringing his hands.

"Don't get me wrong, my mother doesn't love him anymore, and I know we're not our parents. I'd never compare you to my father, I would *never*, but it's just that I— I don't— I just never thought—"

It's the messiest *"it's not you it's me"* speech that Shouto has ever heard. Midoriya seems to be flustered and frustrated at himself, but it's fine. Trauma isn't rational, after all, and Shouto has no intention of forcing him out of his comfort zone just on account of Shouto's feelings.

"It's alright," he says as he lays a hand on Midoriya's arm, trying to soothe him. "Like I said yesterday, I never intended it to be a confession."

And then he remembers himself and retracts his hand. He should break his habit of casually touching Midoriya now, though he can't remember when it even became a habit in the first place—

But Midoriya's hand shoots out to catch Shouto's before he can fully draw away.

"I— I'm not done yet," Midoriya continues determinedly, and Shouto can't help but hold his breath at the way Midoriya is squeezing his hand firmly in such a familiar hold. "That... That's why I freaked out so much yesterday, I think. Because I... I never really thought about love. I didn't *want* to. But after I calmed down, I *did* think about it... about us."

Midoriya takes in a deep breath, and then admits quietly.

"...Back at the summer training camp, when I had a mountain dropped on me. I couldn't see, I couldn't move, I couldn't— I couldn't *breathe*. I thought I was going to die. And then— you know how they say you get flashbacks when you're about to die? I didn't really believe that before because I never had any flashbacks when my father beat me to the brink of death, though maybe that's because five years old isn't long enough to warrant a flashback," (and Shouto's heart *aches* at Midoriya's nonchalant tone and humourless smile.) "But in that mountain, I did see a flashback. I thought of my mom. I thought of

Eraserhead. I thought of All Might."

Midoriya pauses, and then:

"My last thought was of you."

Shouto draws in a quick, sharp breath. Midoriya continues, his voice low and steady now.

"And not that I plan to die anytime soon, but if I can choose who to see the next time I see a flashback... I'd still choose you. If I can choose one last thing to see before I die, I'd want it to be you."

Those words make Shouto lightheaded.

Midoriya lowers his gaze to their entwined hands and keeps talking, as if he doesn't know how much his words are affecting Shouto, as if he doesn't know that he's shattering Shouto's world and rebuilding it from the foundations.

"I... I don't know about *love*. I've never really thought about it. I might even be scared of it. But... But if it's with *you*... I know that when I'm with you, I'm better than when I'm alone. I know that when we're together, we are more than the sum of our parts."

And Shouto is overwhelmed because. How is that *not* a confession? How is that *not* a proclamation of love? It puts Shouto's own simple words of "I love you" to shame. He's overwhelmed, he's floored, he's humbled, he's touched.

Tears prickle at the corners of his eyes at the sheer magnitude of affection Midoriya just casually admits without even understanding what he's saying. Without knowing what that does to Shouto.

Midoriya finally looks back up at Shouto's face, only for his eyes to widen at the tears in Shouto's mismatched eyes.

"Why are you crying?"

Shouto blinks, and the tears spill over.

He squeezes Midoriya's hand.

He *laughs*.

"I love you," he says helplessly, because while these words are woefully lacking, they're all he has. "You know that, right?"

It's a repeat of last night, the very same words that set off this entire thing. But instead of panicking, this time, Midoriya leans forward to rest his forehead against Shouto's.

"I know," he whispers, and Shouto wants to breathe in the words ghosting over his lips. "...I think I love you too."

Shouto grins, freer and brighter than ever before.

"I know."

+ Omake +

"...What now?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I've never done this before."

"Neither have I, you know."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"There is... something, that I've always wanted to do."

"Hm?"

"...Can I call you Izuku?"

"Oh. ...*Oh.* Of course... Shouto."

Chapter End Notes

Originally, I had this great plan to upload this chapter on

February 14th (the “full romance” chapter on Valentine’s Day, I know, aren’t I so smurt) but then shit got hectic irl (including but not limited to my house almost burning down) and, well, here we are now. I’m sorry for the wait, and I sincerely hope that BYW can help you in these troubling times, even just the tiniest bit, in any way at all.

Not entirely unrelatedly, I changed my nickname. I... didn’t feel like a white kiwibird anymore, so now I’m Crowbird (crowbird-kamakse on Tumblr). So don’t be weirded out if some random guy with a crow profile pic starts replying to your comments/posts. It is I!

Stay safe, darlings. Love you all.

Edit: Gosh I can't believe I forgot this, but:
IZUKU HEADBANG

Looking Forward to Growing Old With You

Chapter Notes

So... it's been another what, 4, 5 months since the last update, yeah? (sweatdrop)
Sorry for making you wait. In my defence, remember how I said my house almost burned down? Well this time we got flooded. 2020 is really throwing everything it has at us... Stay safe, everyone.

On a happier note, fan art! Thank you, again, so much, for all your lovely work.
Inko-bunny and Eri-bunny by eaflower123:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/619167607542726656
Izuku holding Aizawa bridal style by Verenise Gonzales:
https://www.wattpad.com/963831184-mis-dibujos-dibujos-si-o-si-parte-1-burn-your
Seraph Izuku by ima-thing-of-soup-bois
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/632669905588715520/im-really-proud-with-how-this-turned-out-hope
Izuku in a green bunny shirt by raetae-gloss:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/633559047856095232
Redo of the human balloons by deuynnoodles:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/633559014989561856
Submission from ski-tty:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/632670215498563584/by-ski-tty-thank-you-again
(If you've made something and haven't had it posted in the AN till now, please give me a poke. Leave a link in the comments or send me a message on Tumblr so we can all Izuku Headbang at it!)

We now also have BYW translated into Russian!!!! Thank you dearly, iron-kirs, for your hard work.
https://ficbook.net/readfic/9479937

For everyone who, like me, doesn't watch the anime, here's Class

1-A's performance.
(I cried the first time I watched it.)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgwUenaQqlM&ab_channel=TOHOanimation%E3%83%81%E3%83%A3%E3%83%B3%E3%83%8D%E3%83%AB

Also, anyone notice that when Todoroki and Sero collab during the festival, Kirishima calls it "Seroroki"? I wonder what he would have said if it was Shouto and Izuku.
I WONDER.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Alright, the show should start soon!” Mirio says cheerfully. He hoists Eri into his arms so she can see over the crowd of people gathered to see Class 1-A’s performance.

Soon the lights turn off and the curtains begin to draw open. Mirio gives Eri a little squeeze. Eri holds her breath for a moment, before—

In true Class 1-A fashion, they begin with a *bang*.

Plus Ultra, after all, as Eri will quickly come to learn.

The gym is bombarded by an explosion of light and sound, so intense that Eri feels as if she’ll be blown away. She tightens her grip on Mirio’s shoulders, frightened for a moment, before she finds a familiar face smiling at her on the stage.

Izuku—Deku—her older brother—her angel—finds Eri’s eyes with unerring accuracy. He grins at her, bright and warm and carefree, and Eri feels her hands instantly relax.

From then on she’s able to take in the show properly. Music like she’s never heard before blasts in her ears. People in bright clothes are dancing on the stage with big smiles, and everyone begins to cheer and laugh along as if it’s contagious. Togata points to Izuku, who hooks his arm with another boy and throws him up in the air where he spins around and becomes a human disco light.

Izuku gives Eri one last grin and a thumbs-up before hurrying behind curtains—“Your screentime’s way too short!” Togata laughs—but even without him, Eri isn’t afraid anymore.

For such a long time, Chisaki had been a constant presence in Eri's life. Not just physically, either. Chisaki was the hand behind every researcher, he was the spray of blood from every murdered babysitter, he was the shackles of the bandages wrapped around her limbs, he was the ghost chained to her shadow, he was the voice that whispered in the darkness and the nightmare that she couldn't wake from.

Even after she was rescued, even after she believed she could be saved, Eri could still feel Chisaki's presence like a cold, heavy cloak draped over her too-small frame.

But here. Here, Eri can't see Chisaki's ghost in the dazzling lights. She can't hear his flat voice over the bombastic music. She can't feel his cold grasp through the heat of the crowd.

Here, Eri is so overwhelmed that there is no space for even Chisaki's memory. She's too busy taking in the sights with wide eyes, too astounded by the swell of music and cheers, too swept up by positive energy vibrating through the entire area.

Sometimes, release doesn't happen through an active struggle for freedom.

Eri simply *forgets* about Chisaki.

She takes in a deep breath.

She throws her arms into the air.

And she *laughs*.

*

"Sorry! Am I late?!" Izuku pants as he joins the special effects team on the rafters after finishing his stunt with Aoyama.

"Nah, you're right on time," Sero reassures him, Kouda nodding in agreement.

Izuku takes a moment to sweep a glance over the crowd. The performance is reaching the climax, with both Class 1-A and the audience pumped up. But there's one more role he has to play.

Or rather, they.

Izuku glances to the side to find Shouto, standing by and ready to move with him as soon as the signal is given. The other boy's eyes crinkle slightly in a subtle smile as soon as their eyes meet, as if it's become reflex.

(To absolutely no one's—except Izuku's—surprise, not a single person in Class 1-A had even bat an eye when Izuku and Shouto started calling each other by their first names.

Izuku felt oddly betrayed.

"Seriously?! Everyone already knew we were practically dating, and no one had the decency to *tell me?!*"

And yeah, okay, even Izuku knew that didn't make any sense, but he couldn't help feeling affronted for some reason. And in true 1-A fashion, everyone just took it in stride.

"Dude, breathe," Kirishima had said while patting Izuku's back. "In our defence, if we were going to have a bro talk or give advice or something, we thought it'd be for Todoroki, not you. Weren't you supposed to be the socially adjusted one?"

Izuku had thought so too, but apparently he's even more clueless than Todoroki, Iida, *and* Bakugo combined. And they all just *assumed* Izuku already knew!

Not for the first time, Izuku wondered if he's surrounded himself with socially inept friends, or if he's actually the socially inept one.

"Mmm. I'm just miffed that Todoroki gets to be called by his first name before me, ribbit. I've been trying to be called 'Tsuyu' since the beginning of the year."

"Sorry, Asui— I mean, Tsuyu!")

Izuku smiles back at Shouto without conscious thought.

"Shouto," Izuku calls, grinning. "Ready?"

It's the exact words he'd said at the Sports Festival. Shouto isn't sure if

Izuku is even aware of the callback, but this time, he can smile back just as freely as he too calls Izuku by name.

“Let’s go, Izuku.”

As soon as Kirishima gives the signal—“Go, TodoDeku!”—the two boys with half-fire quirks jump over the railing together. Shouto makes two paths of ice from the rafters spiralling down to either side of the stage. He and Izuku slide down each ramp of ice while shooting bursts of flames over the awed audience, making literal fireworks to the delighted cheers and whoops of the people below. When they reach the ground, they stand on either side of the stage and reach out a hand to each other— Shouto his left, and Izuku his right.

Fire bursts out from their outstretched hands, arching over their dancing classmates in a bright wreath and joining above the stage. The two streams of fire explode as they merge together, flaring up and bursting into fireworks that look like petals of a flower, or like a brilliant sun, or like the swooping wings of a phoenix as it soars to the sky.

The bright, flickering red and golden flames illuminate the darkness for the climax and finale, bathing the entire stadium in brilliant light. Izuku can clearly see the smiling and laughing faces of the audience.

And there, there they are, he finds Togata again, holding up Eri so that she’s a head above the crowd. Even from this distance he can see how she’s flung her arms into the air, how her cheeks are flushed, and — oh.

Oh.

Tears prickle in Izuku eyes, but his face breaks into a wide grin. Izuku can’t help but turn to look at the other side of the stage. He finds Shouto, who used to have barely any expression at all, who is now smiling so naturally that it’s not just visible to Izuku but to the whole world.

Shouto is smiling.

Eri is smiling.

And Izuku...

Izuku, heart thrumming, eyes wet, throws back his head and *laughs.*

(*Worth it.)*

After the performance, Eri gets properly introduced to Class 1-A where she's already something of a household legend for that time she wrapped Aizawa in a pink ribbon (and around her little finger, whether she knows it or not).

When she's introduced to All Might, though, Eri goes wide-eyed and tugs on Izuku's hand.

"Is he part of our family too?" she asks out of the blue.

Izuku chokes on air. All Might coughs up blood.

"What... what makes you say that?" Izuku asks weakly. Shouto had asked if he was All Might's illegitimate son and the media had joked about him being All Might's secret love child, but he never expected Eri of all people to ask the same thing.

"He has bunny ears too," Eri says innocently, pointing at All Might's hair.

Izuku and All Might look at each other. Then at Eri. Then back at each other. And then, they both burst out laughing.

And yes, while All Might's hair stands up like antennas in his buffed form, they do droop down while in his true form. Like...

Like bunny ears.

Oh my god.

All Might eventually recovers from his laughing fit, wiping the tears from his eyes, and places a large hand on Eri's head.

"I am not a Midoriya, but it would be an honour to be considered part of the family, young Eri."

He pats Eri's head carefully, his gaunt face breaking into a gentle smile, and Eri soon smiles back at him.

Izuku watches their interaction, an adoring smile on his face, when a small "huh," interrupts his thoughts. Izuku glances to the side to watch Shouto raise a hand and tug a strand of his two-toned hair thoughtfully.

"...Maybe I should grow out my hair too," Shouto muses.

Izuku coughs out a startled laugh at that. What's funnier is the fact that Shouto looks at least half serious.

"I mean, I wouldn't stop you, but I'd say you're more of a cat," Izuku sniggers.

Shouto looks at Izuku, then nods, the corner of his lips twitching upwards teasingly.

"I suppose not everyone can pull off looking like a bunny."

"For the last time, I do *not* look like a bunny!"

The rest of their classmates just laugh at him. Traitors.

From then the class splits up into groups to enjoy the rest of the festival. Some people tag along with Izuku and Togata to look after Eri, showing her the sights and letting her try snacks like adoring older siblings.

Eri looks around with wide and shining eyes. Everything must be so new to her after being sequestered away by Chisaki for so long.

Izuku can't help but smile at the way Eri seems to be particularly enthralled by the bright balloons decorated everywhere. He crouches down and points to one senior who's handing out balloons of all shapes and sizes.

"Would you like to get a balloon?"

But Eri surprises him with her answer.

"No. I want to *be* a balloon!"

"..."

Izuku freezes at her bright and carefree answer. He warily glances sideways at Uraraka and, yup, true to his fears, he finds her face alight with unholy glee.

Uh oh.

"...Uraraka, no."

"Uraraka, *yes!*"

With that excited victory cry, Uraraka borrows a strip of rope from

Yaoyorozu, ties it around Eri's waist, steals her gravity, and prances off waving the girl in the air, yelling "Wheeee~!" and cackling madly. Eri's delighted squeals echo throughout the campus.

"Don't worry, I won't let her down!"

"No, that makes me worry. Put her down. Put her *down,* Uraraka, I swear to god—!"

Mirio doubles over and laughs so hard that he looks like he's crying. Staff and students alike cheer for them as Izuku (halfheartedly, to be honest) chases Uraraka through the campus, and Izuku's pretty sure at least three members of Class 1-A are filming their wild chase.

Eri waves her arms in the air, laughing delightedly.

Izuku bites back a grin at the sight, then gives up all pretense of chasing them. He slows his pace, then eventually comes to a stop altogether. He just stands there for a moment, marvelling at everything.

Eri is smiling. Togata is as bright as ever. All Might and Sir Nighteye are slowly mending their relationship. All his friends and family are well.

Izuku can't stop smiling. He feels high and lightheaded. He wonders if this is what it's like to be drunk.

"See?" Shouto says as he catches up to Izuku. "I told you it'd be good for her."

Izuku grins at him, still feeling high and drunk on happiness.

"I never doubted you," he says, and Shouto smiles.

"You didn't need to come all the way here, though. I would have returned sooner or later, you know."

Shouto gives him a *look*.

"Now that we're officially together, I'm never letting you out of my sight and risking you running into danger without me."

Oh. Uh oh.

Izuku turns his head and looks off into the faraway distance. Is he sweating? He might be sweating.

“Yeeeah, about that...”

Shouto goes perfectly still for a moment. When he opens his mouth again, his voice is deceptively calm.

“What did you do.”

Izuku continues to avoid his eyes.

“Weeeell, I went out to buy some supplies early this morning... alone... and ran into Gentle Criminal... and might have gotten into a fight...”

Shouto just stares at Izuku for a long moment before raising a hand to cover his eyes.

“That’s it,” he says slowly, then takes Izuku’s hand and starts walking towards the crowd determinedly. “Come on, we’re going to go find Sero and Yaoyorozu to borrow some tape and bubble wrap.”

“Hey, that’s a bit drastic—”

“*Villain. Cat. Nip*.”

*

It isn’t long after the School Festival before Class 1-A is reunited with Eri. Aizawa brings her to UA on a weekend for her periodical check-up by Recovery Girl, and the hero lets Eri visit the class before returning home.

Eri is welcomed with open arms, with Sato bringing out his home baking and the girls gathering around to play with her hair. (Izuku keeps getting flashbacks to that time they turned him into a demented flower bush. There are still pictures floating around the chat room. *Thanks*, Ojiro.) (Traitor.)

“Eri’s not the only one visiting today,” Aizawa tells the class. “You have other guests, too.”

“That would be... us!” an exuberant voice follows up, and out pops the Wild Wild Pussy Cats complete with their trademark pose, much to the delighted welcome of Class 1-A.

“It’s been a while,” Izuku greets Kota who’s also tagged along.

“Yeah...” Kota replies, but he acts surprisingly shy, blushing and not meeting Izuku’s eyes. It’s almost as if he’s not the same kid who called Izuku crazy and an idiot on the first day they met. Huh.

“Come see this, Midoriya,” Mandalay beckons to him. Her face is teasing and also a little proud as she points to the small, bright red sneakers by the doorway that can’t be anyone's but Kota’s. “He chose them himself. He kept insisting they had to be red.”

Red, just like Izuku’s shoes.

“It’s not... It wasn’t...!” Kota waves his arms frantically in front of his shoes as if trying to hide them from sight, blushing fiercely.

Oh, Izuku realizes with a jolt of surprise. He finally understands why Kota’s being so uncharacteristically shy.

—Well, it’s not like Izuku has any room to judge. It took Izuku weeks to be able to look at All Might and Aizawa without going all starry-eyed, after all. At least Kota doesn’t have an actual shrine dedicated to him.

(Right?)

“Nii-chan?”

“Oh, Eri!”

Izuku turns around to find that Eri has escaped the clutches of the girls while they were distracted greeting the Pussy Cats. The little girl scurries over to Izuku, the many ribbons in her hair fluttering like butterfly wings. She pauses when she spots Kota, though, and promptly hides behind Izuku. After a moment, she peers around Izuku’s leg at Kota.

And isn’t that just adorable?

“Eri,” Izuku introduces with a smile, “this is Kota. Kota, this is Eri.”

The two children stare at each other from either side of Izuku, sizing each other up. Eri eyes the way Kota is glaring at her with jealousy and Kota narrows his eyes at the way Eri is clutching Izuku almost possessively.

Rival, they conclude at the same time.

And that moment birthed a rivalry that would span a lifetime.

“Should... should we separate them?” Shouto asks after the glowering silence between Eri and Kota has stretched on a bit too long.

Izuku looks down at the two, then smiles.

“Nah. They’ll get along fine.”

Shouto raises an eyebrow and pointedly looks between the two children who are now glaring death at each other.

“Like a house on fire,” Izuku adds, smiling serenely.

For some reason, that doesn’t reassure Shouto.

“That’s... supposed to be a good thing, right? ...Right? ...Izuku???”

Izuku just smiles. Mandalay laughs. Aizawa sighs as if he can already feel the future headaches to come.

Shouto looks at the two children who are now hissing under their breath at each other. Then he looks at Izuku. And he shrugs. Izuku might be thicker than a brick wall when it comes to his own love life, but he could set up a therapy clinic with all the people he’s helped, including Shouto himself. So Shouto is just... going to default to trusting him.

“House on fire,” he nods. “Sure.”

*

Izuku bursts into Shouto’s room on a Sunday afternoon after having just returned from a visit home.

“You’ve ruined milk for me,” is what he blurts, completely out of the blue.

Shouto blinks.

“...Huh?”

“And honey, too.”

"…Excuse me?"

Izuku starts pacing around the room, gesturing wildly with his hands.

"And it's not even specifically warmed milk with honey, it's just milk and honey in general! Like, I was getting Eri milk for her cereal this morning and as soon as I see the carton I think of you, and we don't even *have* honey in our house but when we went grocery shopping I saw a jar of honey and suddenly you're on my mind."

Shouto slowly sinks down on his futon to take a seat and watch Izuku rant. He has no idea what has Izuku so frazzled, but he figures Izuku will get to the point when he's ready.

"And as if that's not bad enough, it doesn't even end with milk and honey! I'd see a book and think 'oh, Shouto might like that,' or see a poster for a movie and wonder if you'd like to go watch it together. Eri gave me a candied apple today and my first instinct was to bring it back to show it to you. And I *knew* you weren't there with me today at home, but I kept turning around to talk to you as if you were. As if you *should* be!"

Izuku ruffles his hair roughly, making some strands of hair fall out of his half-bun so that his hair looks even fluffier than usual. Shouto is tempted to pet it back into place, but decides to hold off until Izuku has worked off whatever has gotten into him.

"And the thing is, now that I think about it, this isn't even a recent development. I just hadn't noticed it before. It was so, so natural, so gradual. For so long, you've been a constant presence on my mind. I expect… no, I *want* you to be there. Almost everything links back to you. And I…"

Izuku trails off as he finally halts his pacing. He looks at Shouto with an almost lost expression.

"… How could I have not known I loved you?"

Shouto just stares at Izuku for a long moment.

And then he buries his flaming face in his palms with a groan.

"*Oh my god*," Shouto moans. "How do you keep saying things like that? With such a straight face?!"

He peeks out from between his fingers to halfheartedly glare at Izuku.

“You… you’re just not fair,” he sighs.

Before, Izuku would have been confused and clueless at those vague words. But now he smiles cheekily.

“You love me for it,” Izuku snipes back jokingly, and Shouto lets out a small huff of laughter.

“I do,” he acknowledges, completely sincere despite Izuku’s joking tone. “You know that, right?”

Izuku kneels down on the futon in front of Shouto, and Shouto takes his hands away from his face to reach out and hold Izuku’s hands gently, ever so gently. Izuku lets him, exasperated and touched and so unbearably fond. He smiles.

“I know.”

*

Izuku and Shouto share so many similarities.

They both have half-fire quirks that they used to hate. They were both subject to household abuse. They both have ‘daddy issues,’ to put it lightly. They’re both trying to grow past all of that.

But while their similarities let them bond and understand each other better, they’re still very different people.

For instance, out of the two of them, Izuku is the one with the potty mouth. Izuku will casually drop a swear word here and there (he blames having grown up with Bakugo as his childhood friend) whereas Shouto will only curse sparingly, if at all.

Izuku is also the one who frequently uses pet names.

While the Midoriya household has been painfully careful with physical affection, Inko has always used a variety of endearments that Izuku seems to have unknowingly picked up too.

Inko calls Izuku everything from sweetie to honey, and Izuku finds himself unconsciously dropping the same endearments to both his little sister and his boyfriend. Eri had giggled as she pointed out that

both Inko and Izuku use the same pet names while Shouto had dropped his mug and shattered it on the floor the first time Izuku unconsciously called him “darling”.

Shouto blushes beautifully whenever Izuku casually drops an endearment, but he himself never uses one.

Izuku isn’t upset about it.

Because Shouto pronounces “Izuku” like some people say “beloved” or “dearest”. Because his lips caress Izuku’s name like it’s the sweetest endearment that could be shaped by his tongue. Because he says “Izuku” the same way Izuku calls him “darling”.

And while Izuku may casually fluster Shouto with endearments, he’s the one who’s flustered whenever Shouto touches him.

Shouto thinks it’s so messed up that, out of the two of them, while Izuku is the more socially adjusted, it’s Shouto who’s more familiar with physical intimacy, physical affection, or romance in general. It’s just so messed up, what that implies.

Because you see, although Rei was forced into an arranged marriage, Endeavor still took her out on dates and gave her flowers. Rei still loved and kissed and hugged her children freely until she snapped and was sent away.

Izuku never saw anything like that. He never saw Hisashi do a kind thing for Inko, never saw what a healthy relationship was supposed to look like. Inko loved Izuku *dearly*, but she didn’t dare hug him *because* she loved him, afraid that she might worsen his injuries with her embrace.

This is the reason Shouto reigns in his impulses to lean closer. It’s why he limits himself to hand-holding and gentle hugs. It’s why he stops himself before he can dip his head to catch Izuku’s lips in his teeth.

Because while the fact that they’re dating each other means that now Shouto *can* do those things, just because you ‘can’ doesn’t mean you *should*.

Shouto doesn’t fully understand what it must feel like to be traumatized by love, but he can tell that it’s not easy for Izuku to work through that and be with him.

But Izuku is trying. He’s *trying*, dammit, and it melts Shouto’s heart

because he can tell. He can feel the way Izuku tenses before relaxing every time they hug, he can see how counterintuitive it is for Izuku to reach out instead of pulling away. But Izuku is trying so hard to break old habits and meet Shouto halfway. So it's the least Shouto can do to not push him and let Izuku adjust at his own pace. They can take their time.

This is pretty much how their relationship progresses; Izuku casually flustering Shouto one moment, Shouto making Izuku blush bright red the next. Give and take, push and pull. Like breathing.

Class 1-A is of the opinion that they're either adorable or disgusting, depending on who you ask.

"Action, drama, fluff, and romance. Best year of school ever. I give it a ten out of ten, would enroll again," Ashido nods sagely when Hagakure pretends to interview her, whereas Bakugo only responds with a glare and "Fuck off and die."

"Wow. That was pretty tame, coming from Bakugo," Ojiro remarks from where he's lounging on the sofa.

"Indeed," Tokoyami nods. By this point, Class 1-A has gotten far too used to Bakugo's glares and death wishes for it to phase them in the slightest.

"Where are Midoriya and Todoroki, anyways?" Sato asks as he emerges from the kitchen with a plate of cookies. "I have leftovers for them to try to reheat, but no one answered when I knocked on either of their rooms."

"Iida? Do you know?" Kirishima prompts.

Iida straightens his spine and puffs up his chest.

"Of course! As class president, it is my duty to keep track of our classmates!"

"...Wait a sec," Uraraka gasps. "It's a date, isn't it? They're on a date!"

Hagakure squeals at that while Kaminari groans and boos.

"It's... actually a far serious matter than that," Yaoyorozu heads off almost apologetically. "They... they've gone to visit Endeavor at the

hospital.”

The common room quickly sobers at her quiet words.

Most of them saw the battle between Endeavor and the new Nomu live on television. While Endeavor ultimately won, it was very, very close.

“...Yeah. I guess it makes sense for Todoroki to go see his dad after that,” Jiro says sadly.

But Iida shakes his head.

“Actually, I believe Todoroki only tagged along to keep Midoriya company.”

“Huh?”

“Wait. Then that means the person who wants to see Endeavor is...?”

*

Being a bad person is not the same thing as being a villain.

Todoroki Enji is not a villain, but he is a bad person. A bad husband, a bad father, and a bad man.

Only recently has he been able to slowly come to this realization.

Even before this change, Endeavor was objective enough to know that none of his children would come rushing to visit him at the hospital, even after such a close brush with death.

But when he’s informed that he has a guest from UA, he can’t help but hope.

He should have known better. When the door opens, the person who enters does indeed have a half-fire quirk but isn’t the boy Endeavor was expecting.

“...Midoriya Izuku,” he greets slowly.

“Endeavor,” Izuku returns, his smile still just a tad too wide, too

sharp, too full of teeth to be sincere.

Silence falls between the two for a long moment after that. Izuku stands there, pointedly ignoring the chair by Endeavor's bedside. Unlike when they met at the Sports Festival, Endeavor doesn't start rambling on his own but waits quietly for Izuku to open the conversation.

Izuku eyes the new, dark scar Endeavor has gained. It marks the left side of his face, just like his youngest son, after all these years.

Calling it just deserts would be crude, and saying it's poetic justice would be cruel.

Izuku isn't either, so he keeps his mouth closed and just stands there wordlessly for a moment.

To be honest, even Izuku himself can't say for certain why he came to see Endeavor. He's never been a huge fan of the Flame Hero even before learning of his abuse, and after he did, well.

But even so, there are some things Izuku can't deny. Endeavor is still the No. 2 hero. He's still Shouto's father. He's still someone Izuku used to look up to.

Todoroki Enji is a bad person.

But Endeavor is not a villain.

Being a bad person is not the same thing as being a villain. And Izuku...

"...I once told you my father also has a fire quirk," Izuku finally says quietly.

Endeavor blinks, then slightly inclines his head to show that he remembers without interrupting. His attitude and willingness to listen is so different from the first time they met that it almost throws Izuku off track.

"He also... 'used' me and my mother for his own purpose."

Izuku watches Endeavor's face carefully as he says the next sentence.

"He's been in prison for the last ten years, and will be for the rest of his life."

Ah. There it is.

As a hardcore fan of heroes, Izuku grew up watching many videos of interviews, fights, and rescue scenes. The hero he watched most was, without question, All Might. Eraserhead would have been right up there with him if only he didn't avoid cameras like the plague. Which means that the honour of second place went to Endeavor.

So while Izuku may have never liked Endeavor even before learning of what he did to his family, he still knows the hero well enough to be able to see the subtle shift in his expression. The way the line of his mouth presses downwards, how his brows draw into a grimace, the tightening of his eyes.

Izuku doubts Endeavor would have reacted like this before.

It's proof that Endeavor has changed. For better or worse, Izuku can't say yet, but he'd *changed*.

That doesn't make everything alright, of course. Just because Endeavor has changed and is trying doesn't automatically absolve his sins or mean he's deserving of forgiveness. That decision is still solely the right of his victims.

But as someone who used to look up to Endeavor, as someone who's been burned by his true nature, as someone who cares for his son, Izuku decides that it's enough for him to give the man (the hero) (the father) a second chance. For Shouto's sake, if nothing else. (Because while Shouto may have refused to come see Endeavor himself, Izuku saw the way Shouto's hands shook and clenched when Endeavor was pushed into a corner by the new Nomu. He was there when Shouto's legs gave out in relief after seeing Endeavor's victory, and he was the one who helped him walk shakily back to his room.) (Just because someone is your father doesn't mean they won't hurt you. Likewise, just because you hate someone doesn't mean you don't still care for them in some way.)

"...I guess what I'm trying to say is... I used to look up to you as a hero I thought was different from my father. I hate what you've done as a husband and a father. But I do see that you're trying to change now. So..."

Izuku pins Endeavor with a look.

"I'll be watching."

Watch me, Endeavor had told the world (plead to his family) at the Japanese Hero Billboard Chart. The man nods solemnly.

“That is all I ask for.”

Another moment of silence descends before Izuku breaks it again.

“Right,” he says briskly. He got the main reason for his visit out of the way, so he might as well get this over with and go rejoin Shouto. “I heard your favourite food is uzumochi, so I got this for you as a get well gift.”

Izuku tosses the small package to Endeavor, who catches it easily. He’s about to give his thanks when he notices the contents of the package. Endeavor blinks, then looks at Izuku.

“…These are carrot sticks,” he says haltingly.

“I know,” Izuku reassures him with a bland smile.

Endeavor stares even more.

“…You heard I like uzumochi…”

“Uh-huh.”

“…and got me carrot sticks instead.”

“Yup.”

Endeavor is at loss for words. His own children tend to be passive-aggressive (or just plain aggressive) in their defiance, so he’s never experienced anything like Midoriya Izuku.

He wonders if this is what they call “trolling.”

Satisfied with his handiwork, Izuku cheerily bids Endeavor goodbye and leaves his hospital room. Shouto is waiting for him just outside, leaning against the wall on the other side of the door.

“I’m done here,” Izuku tells him. “Are you sure you don’t want to see him?”

Shouto hesitates for a moment. He glances at the closed door of Endeavor’s hospital room, then nods firmly.

“I’m sure.”

Izuku doesn't push any further.

They walk side by side as they leave the hospital. Shouto takes Izuku's hand and gently rubs his scars before carefully saying his next words.

"You know, you didn't have to come if it was for me. I know how much you don't like him. If you felt obligated or something just because we're together..."

But Izuku shakes his head.

"No. Don't worry, I wanted to."

And then he smiles and changes the subject to something lighter.

"By the way, send my thanks to Fuyumi-san for telling me about the uzumochi, would you?"

"Oh yeah. Why did you ask her? You didn't even buy it."

"I just wanted to make sure I didn't give Endeavor his favourite food by accident."

Shouto coughs out a laugh and smiles fondly.

"You're such a troll. What *did* you give him?"

"Carrot sticks."

"Figures."

"Hm?"

"Bunny."

"Am not!"

They jostle each other as they laugh at the familiar banter. Izuku marvels at how easy and natural it feels when it's only been a few weeks, months at most.

Then again, it's always been like that with him and Shouto; from the moment they reached out to each other, they just clicked. Fit together like two pieces of a puzzle, instantly drawn in by an orbital force and bound with an intimacy that transcended time.

Some people drift apart with the passing of time. They may have a

falling out, or grow weary of each other. But Izuku likes to think (to hope) that they will only grow closer as time passes. That they will grow into and around each other as they grow old together.

Izuku smiles and squeezes their intertwined hands. Shouto squeezes back.

Shouto, Eri, his friends, heroes, and family.

Life may not be fair, or kind, but he still looks forward to a future with them.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for waiting.

Some of you may have noticed that 1. BYW is now a part of a series, and 2. there's a chapter count.

1. There will definitely be an 'Eri and Kota's epic rivalry throughout the ages' oneshot coming up, so subscribe to the series or the author page if you want to be notified when it comes out!

2. Regarding the chapter count. Initially I was going to write an original arc after the Eri/Overhaul arc (featuring Dabi and Hisashi's return, AFO DID do something to Izuku while he was unconscious, we find out why the LoV wanted Aizawa's blood so bad, much pain and angst, Dad Might vs. Dadzawa vs. Hisashit) but I'm going to have even less time to write in the foreseeable future, so I'm going to wrap things up in two more chapters. To be honest, I'm fairly happy with where we're going to end things. The last chapter of BYW has been finished and written for a very long time, and I hope it'll be to your liking.

It's a bit early to say goodbyes, but thank you for everything. Your patience, your support, and your lovely comments. See you (hopefully) soon!
IZUKU HEADBANG

Burn Your Wings

Chapter Notes

Judging by the comments, it seems some people think the TodoDeku in BYW is platonic.
It's not.
Hoo boy, is it not.
What I'm trying to say is: they make out in this chapter, so if you feel uncomfortable with that, uh skip that section? It's nothing R rated—they're still smoll lil beans, after all—but it definitely ain't platonic.
Honestly I'm confused how people thought it's gonna be platonic in the first place when Shouto's been thirsty for a *while* now, but, eh. Yeah. The kiss is finally here, y'all.

Thank you for your wonderful art!!
Class 1-A Chat Room for Emergencies by fluffi-bunny:

https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/636192819467436032/click-for-better-quality-some-art-based-on-one

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku used to dream about Icarus. He's dreamt of clawing his way up to the sun only to be plunged into the cold ocean below. It's his most familiar and constant nightmare to this day.

Since enrolling in UA, he's had many experiences of shooting upwards and plummeting to the ground. He's used his *pull* to zip around at high speed, used Full Cowl to agilely flip and skid, and now with his *push* he's created a special move that's not quite flying but close enough.

Izuku is familiar with the sensation of rising and falling.

But nothing could have prepared him for *this*.

"AAAAA*AAAAAA**aaaaaa*aaaaaaa*aa*aaaa*aah*!"

A sound that's halfway between a terrified shriek and a thrilled yelp

tears its way out of Izuku's throat as the rollercoaster plummets to the ground. Izuku throws his arms up in the air and laughs out loud while Shouto, who's sitting beside him, tightens his grip on the safety bar with a pale face.

"Oh my god," Izuku gasps once he's gotten off the ride for the sixth time. Is he shaking? He might be shaking. "That was— that— what in the— oh my *god*."

"Tsk," Bakugo clicks his tongue. "You're like a brat that's gonna pass out from his own excitement. What are you, a hyperactive puppy?"

No one else seems to be as flushed high on adrenaline as Izuku, though that might be because no one else was crazy enough to ride non-stop. Everyone else either took breaks between rides or—like Shouto—only rode the thrill rides once.

"Are... are you okay, Midoriya?" Jiro asks worriedly. Apparently she doesn't trust Izuku's opinion, seeing as she immediately turns to Yaoyorozu instead of waiting for Izuku's answer. "Is he okay?"

Yaoyorozu puts the back of her hand on Izuku's flushed cheek, looks at how wide his eyes are blown, and shakes her head.

"We shouldn't have let him ride the rollercoaster six times in a row, back to back. I'd say he's gone into an adrenaline high."

Izuku hears her, considers her opinion, reflects on his condition, and yeah, this sure does feel like he's high.

"I'm riding it again. Right now," he declares, only for his classmates to frantically stop him.

"Stop! Stop, dude! Just, just chill for a moment and calm down first, okay?!" Kirishima shouts as Shoji and Dark Shadow strong-arm him in place.

"Quick! Distract him from the rides! Here, eat this!" Iida shouts as he shoves a hotdog into Izuku's hands. Izuku obediently munches on the food in a slightly dazed state.

Back when they were taking the Provisional License Exam, back when Izuku first introduced Uraraka to the idea of human balloons, Izuku told her and Sero that he'd never been to an amusement park. Being the kind people they are, his friends had promised to go out together sometime.

So here they are, the entirety of Class 1-A out on a field trip to an amusement park.

Izuku has never been to an amusement park before, but he's had some general ideas of what it's about. Thrilling rides, junk food, balloons (the kind made of plastic and filled with helium, not the, you know, living/squirming/screaming variety that Class 1-A has become used to). So far, the real thing has met and exceeded all his expectations.

And it's a *lot* of fun.

"Ah, I remember when I first rode a rollercoaster when I was little," Ashido nods understandingly as she pats Izuku's back. "I was so excited I rode it four times in a row. And then I threw up."

"Midoriya's halfway there, and Todoroki already looks like he's gonna puke," Kaminari points out, looking like part of him is worried while the other part finds it hilarious that two of the strongest people in their class have been brought so low by a mere thrill ride.

True to Kaminari's words, Shouto's face *is* paler than usual, Izuku thinks as he gulps down the last of his hotdog. He and Shouto are the only ones who've never been to an amusement park before, and it's almost funny how drastically different their reactions are.

"You okay?" he asks.

Shouto nods once. Then he shakes his head. And then he wordlessly reaches out a hand to hold Izuku's sleeve by his fingertips, as if he needs something to ground himself.

Adorable, Izuku thinks. He shakes off Shouto's hand from his sleeve and laces their fingers together instead.

"Alright, you guys win. I've calmed down a bit. How about we take a look at the stalls and attractions instead?"

"Oh! I want to try the haunted house, then!" Hagakure jumps up and down.

"No way, not again! How about the gaming booths?"

"Mn, I need to go shopping for souvenirs, ribbit."

Once they stray away from the rides it's actually quite similar to the school festival, but it's still fun to mess around together. Shouto buys a

bunny-ear headband and forces it on Izuku's head, to which Izuku retaliates by making him wear a cat-ear headband. Shoji almost breaks the punching machine and Kouda gets absolutely swarmed at the petting zoo.

Once they get to the gaming booths and see the prizes, Izuku nearly drops everything in excitement.

"I am going to destroy this stall," he declares solemnly as he loads his rifle. The person manning the shooting booth sweats nervously while Class A laughs and cheers him on.

It takes a lot of trial and error, but Izuku eventually manages to get all the prizes he wanted. All four of them are soft plushies about the size of his head. One is a white bunny rabbit with red eyes that's just *perfect* for Eri. The black cat is for Eraserhead, and the golden retriever for All Might.

"And this one's for you!" Izuku proudly presents to Shouto.

Shouto blinks down at the soft, round, white and red cat plushy in his arms. It stares back at him with green button eyes. Shouto pokes it in the cheek, and the fake whiskers tickle his finger.

The corner of his lips twitches upwards.

He hugs it tentatively, glancing at Izuku over the ears of the cat.

"Thank you," he says softly.

Izuku beams.

"Imma go ride the rollercoaster one last time before we leave," Izuku declares, joined by Kaminari and Ashido.

Shouto nods at the armful of three stuffed animals weighing him down. "Well, they're not going to let you on with all that."

"Good point," Izuku concedes, then turns to wave at Bakugo. "Kacchan! Kacchan, hold these for me, would you?!"

"Oh *hell* no, get those things away from me!"

"Come on, Kacchan, please?!"

"Give 'em to Half-and-Half!"

“He already has the cat, look, if you can just take them for a sec while I go for one more ride—”

“Deku, you sonova—!”

Despite Bakugo’s hissing refusal, Midoriya Izuku’s wide green eyes are a force to be reckoned with and will get him what he wants. Shouto watches fondly as Uraraka gleefully takes photos of Bakugo grumpily holding three cutsie stuffed animals. The contrast between his murderous expression and the soft dolls makes it even funnier.

“You know, I can never tell if Deku is the most oblivious cinnamon roll or if he’s the world’s most straight-faced troll. Do you think he does it on purpose?” Uraraka muses as she uploads the photo on the group chat.

Shouto snorts.

“In this case? Oh, definitely.”

*

It would have been nice to be able to stay and watch the night parade and fireworks, but living in the dorms means they have a curfew so Class 1-A has to reluctantly leave the amusement park in the evening.

Izuku and Shouto break off from the group at the subway station to stop by Shouto’s house and pick up some more clothes. Izuku’s only ever been to Bakugo’s house before, so he looks around with interest as Shouto leads him through their wide house.

“You weren’t kidding when you said your house is Japanese style,” he remarks. “I’ve only seen something like this on television. And your room back at the dorms.”

Shouto makes a *hm* sound, looking back at Izuku while he leads the way.

“Do you... not like it?”

There's a faint hint of worry in his voice that not many people will catch, guilty since Izuku almost lives in Shouto's Japanese themed room as much as Shouto does in Izuku's. But Izuku *does* hear it, and that's just sweet, isn't it? He smiles reassuringly.

"It's a refreshing change. Though I do prefer a mattress to a futon most days."

Shouto's room at home isn't much different from the one at the dorms. Izuku looks around while Shouto packs some clothes for the colder weather when he spots something on the desk.

A choked off laugh slips out as Izuku approaches.

There, sitting innocently on Shouto's desk, is a framed cut out of the news clip that came out after the Sports Festival. The words [MIDORIYA IZUKU: SUPER STRENGTH AND FIRE... THE SECRET LOVE CHILD OF ALL MIGHT AND ENDEAVOR?] are clearly visible, along with the photo of Izuku bursting into firey wings.

"Oh my god," Izuku laughs. "What... why... why is this here? And *framed*, too?"

To commemorate the first time you texted me, is one answer Shouto could have given. *Because I really like that photo of you,* would be another. Or even *I wanted physical proof of that day*.

But evidently Izuku's sense of humour has rubbed off Shouto because what he settles on is: "To commemorate the addition of the newest Todoroki."

Izuku laughs out loud at Shouto's deadpanned joke.

"Shouto? Are you... oh."

It seems someone else was in the house, drawn to Shouto's room by the sound of Izuku's laughter. Izuku finds himself facing Todoroki Fuyumi and Natsuo, Shouto's older siblings. He's heard about them from Shouto, and Shouto even asked Fuyumi what Endeavor's favourite food was on his behalf, but it's the first time any of them are meeting in person.

All four of them just kind of stare at each other for a stunned moment.

Eventually, it's Izuku who tries to break the ice by making a joke.

“Hi. I’m the newest Todoroki,” he says, pointing to the article claiming he’s Endeavor’s secret child.

But instead of laughing like expected, or following Izuku’s finger to the article, Fuyumi and Natsuo glance at each other. They exchange a *look* that only siblings can understand, and as one, they turn to face Izuku and Shouto.

“Way to go, little bro!” Natsuo grins as he slaps Shouto’s back. Shouto stumbles. “Never thought you’d get hitched before any of us!”

And wait, what?

Fuyumi looks both elated and upset at the same time.

“Why wasn’t I invited to the wedding?!” Fuyumi wails while wringing her hands.

Both Izuku and Shouto sputter. They think— what, their first thought isn’t that Izuku’s joking about the article, but that they’re *married* and *that’s* why Izuku’s a Todoroki?! Just how— what— huh?!

It’s only when Izuku notices that Fuyumi is shaking as if she’s holding in peels of laughter that he realizes the two of them are being pranked. The façade doesn’t last long as both of Shouto’s older siblings collapse into each other in a fit of howling laughter. Natsuo outright guffaws and Fuyumi’s glasses are knocked askew from how hard she’s laughing.

“Oh, man, you should have seen your faces! I’ve never seen Shouto with that much expression!”

“So sweet... so pure... so cute... oh dearies, you make this so easy!”

Izuku stares in disbelief before he turns to Shouto.

“...You never told me your siblings are massive trolls,” he accuses.

Shouto is still staring at his giggling siblings like he’s seeing them for the first time.

“...I didn’t know either,” he whispers in quiet awe.

And that’s just sad. But at least now they’re comfortable enough with each other to tease and make jokes, right? Izuku is happy for them, especially now that he has Eri for a little sister and has gained some perspective.

Introductions go much more smoothly after that stint. Thankfully, Izuku is welcomed with open arms. (To be honest, Natsuo still can't wrap his head around the fact that his little brother, that human-icicle-Shouto, has actually thawed enough to smile and laugh and *date* someone.) (Fuyumi, on the other hand. Fuyumi ships them hard.) Izuku and Shouto can't stay long because of the dorm's curfew, but Fuyumi doesn't let them leave without making them promise to come by for a meal later.

"That was... something," Izuku says once they've arrived back at the dorms and are chilling in Shouto's room. He's new to all this sibling dynamics thing, but he could feel the genuine, cautious care underlying their every interaction. "I'm glad I got to finally meet them."

Shouto hums in agreement, but he doesn't meet Izuku's eyes as he carefully puts down his new cat plushy on his futon. Izuku cocks his head to the side.

"Shouto?"

The other boy glances at Izuku out of the corner of his eye, darts his gaze away, and bites his lip. Is that another blush dusting his cheeks?

"I... about... what they said," Shouto begins hesitantly. Izuku isn't sure what's going on but he waits it out patiently until Shouto manages to scrounge up the courage to say what's been sitting on the tip of his tongue.

He never could have expected what Shouto eventually says.

"If... if you're alright with it. Then... instead of you becoming a Todoroki, I'd much rather that *I* become a *Midoriya*."

And he says this in such a careful, soft voice, all shy and bashful, eyes lowered and cheeks flushed, as if he isn't sure it's okay for him to ask of this, as if he's embarrassed to even admit he's been thinking about this so seriously.

Izuku just... he just kind of stares. Analysis is Izuku's specialty, so some part of his brain is aware of the implications that Shouto would be free from Endeavor's family name if he takes Izuku's, and another part of his brain is freaking out over the fact that Shouto just low-key proposed to him. But most of him just *melts* at how unbearably sweet this is.

He falls a little in love all over again.

And you see, Izuku doesn't really know what romance is supposed to look like. He's never seen any good, healthy examples. He's never been good with physical contact. He's been getting better, thanks to all the great hugs he's been receiving from his friends and mentors, and what with Shouto habitually glomping his hand even before they were together, but he's never felt the urge to reach out to someone other than for support and comfort. He's never known what desire is like. He's never felt the need to kiss someone.

Until now.

"*I'll be the first to admit I'm not the best with social norms. But even I know it's not 'just friends' when you want to kiss someone*," Shouto had told him.

"Oh," Izuku says faintly. "So this is what it feels like."

Izuku reaches out to hold Shouto's face in his hands, gently turning his face to look at him. Shouto is still avoiding his eyes, cheeks flushed and warm under Izuku's hands.

"I'm going to kiss you," Izuku blurts out, and Shouto's gaze instantly flies to meet Izuku's. "Okay?"

Shouto's eyes are wide, lips slightly parted, and he's looking at Izuku like he's just been granted a gift that he's always wished for but never expected.

"*Please*," his voice breaks.

He closes his eyes.

And... nothing happens for a long moment.

Shouto eventually opens his eyes again. He finds Izuku hasn't moved an inch, his brows furrowed as he studies Shouto's face with a puzzled, contemplative look. For a moment, Shouto is scared that something is wrong, that he's pushed too far, that he's projected too much, that Izuku doesn't actually *want* to, or that—

"Izuku?"

Izuku blinks slowly.

"I... have no idea how to do this," he admits, his ears turning pink.

And Shouto can't help it.

He bursts out laughing.

"*Gods*, I love you," Shouto says helplessly between chuckles. Izuku makes a face at him, but Shouto can see the smile tugging at his lips and the splotch of colour blooming on his cheeks. Shouto had been willing to wait for Izuku as long as needed, of course. He'd been willing to reign in his desires and urges, but knowing that Izuku *wants* him too is enough to make his stomach flip-flop happily.

Shouto knows that it's so very messed up, how unfamiliar Izuku is with physical contact. It's so messed up that Shouto is the one who's comparatively more experienced. But he can't help some small part of him that finds it absolutely adorable. (Can't help some deep, possessive part of him that's fiercely satisfied to be the one to teach him.)

"Here, let's try it this way," Shouto says gently. He takes hold of Izuku's right hand. This is familiar. They'd first held hands all the way back at the Sports Festival, and since Hosu it's become so natural it's almost a habit at this point.

Shouto raises Izuku's hand and presses his lips to the blocky knuckles.

"Is this okay?" he asks, his lips brushing over the deformed bones, warm breath caressing sensitive skin, mismatched eyes crinkled in blatant affection, and nope, this is not okay, this is not familiar *at all*, it feels like Izuku's heart just leapt into his throat, and—

Izuku swallows thickly, and nods.

Shouto lowers Izuku's hand from his mouth to his chest to splay it over his heart. The frantic rhythm is clear under their joined hands.

"Can you feel that?" Shouto asks quietly, and Izuku doesn't know what to do except nod wordlessly once more.

Shouto smiles, all achingly soft and terribly smitten. He takes a step closer to Izuku, right into his personal space, and Izuku can *feel* Shouto's heartbeat picking up, and Izuku's heart speeds up as if to keep pace.

Izuku doesn't even know to close his eyes when Shouto leans forward to brush his lips against his cheek, as frozen in place as he is. He shivers and swallows dryly. They haven't even done anything yet, not

really, but Izuku isn't sure what it is—atmosphere, circumstance, intention?—that's making his insides all funny. It feels like he's nervous, or on an adrenaline high, or like he's ill, and worse than all of that and better at the same time.

"How was that?" Shouto asks in a breathy whisper against his ear, and Izuku just cannot.

Izuku drops his burning face into Shouto's neck.

"Stop asking," he almost groans, and Shouto laughs again. He leans his cheek against Izuku's head, bringing his arms around to cradle him.

"Want to stop here?" he asks gently. He doesn't want to, of course, but he can. For Izuku. He can tell how overwhelmed Izuku is, and even if he's opened up to the concept of physical affection, that doesn't mean he's okay right from the get-go. He won't push. They can take their time.

But Izuku glares up at him.

"Oh, *hell* no."

And then he unceremoniously picks Shouto up.

Izuku may be shorter but Shouto knows he's packed with hard muscle. Which means he can pick up and carry Shouto like he weighs nothing, and the casual display of strength makes something liquid hot twist and pool in Shouto's gut as he wraps his legs around Izuku's waist. He loops his arms around Izuku's shoulders and nuzzles into the bare stretch of skin by Izuku's collar where his neck meets his shoulder.

"That tickles," Izuku huffs a breath of laughter, and Shouto savours the sound.

He wonders what sound Izuku would make if he bites down.

A thought for later, he decides when Izuku lowers them down to sit on the futon.

"I feel like I might fall over," Izuku admits ruefully in explanation at Shouto's questioning glance. Well, it's nice to know Shouto isn't the only one feeling like his knees might give out.

Shouto's almost sitting in Izuku's lap in this position, Izuku's arms

around his waist while Shouto links his fingers behind the back of Izuku's neck. There's almost no space between them at all once they lean into each other, hair tangling together as they touch foreheads.

All it would take is the slightest tilt of his chin to brush their lips. So Shouto does that. He grazes his mouth against Izuku's, and Izuku's breath stutters. Shouto presses their lips together again, and again, soft and fleeting. He has no idea when he closed his eyes but when he opens them, Izuku's green eyes are but an inch away and blown wide open.

They stare into each other's eyes for a long moment. And as if that's a signal, Izuku starts kissing back.

They're both too eager, too inexperienced to manage anything but a messy attempt. They bump their chins and smush their noses, lips missing by a mile and arms tightening in an almost desperate embrace. It takes them far too long to realize that they should probably figure out an angle for this.

Izuku huffs a breath of laughter against Shouto's mouth and it tastes glorious. He unconsciously parts his lips as if to swallow the sound whole, then finds that both of them are open-mouthed.

The first slide of wet lips isn't intentional.

They both freeze at the foreign sensation, eyes blown wide and pulse racing.

The second time is definitely intentional, rushed and hurried and tinged with a desperate sort of hunger, all clashing teeth and clumsy tongue. Shouto shifts to kneel over Izuku's lap, knees planted on either side of Izuku's hips, using the leverage to lean down into Izuku's mouth, and Izuku arches up against him. For all that Izuku still has no idea what he's doing, he knows he needs *more*.

Both Izuku and Shouto may be inexperienced, but they're both fast learners, and soon their kisses are less bumping teeth and more of an attempt to swallow each other whole. Shouto gasps against Izuku's lips and Izuku takes that as an invitation to lick into his mouth. A noise catches in Izuku's throat when Shouto's fingers tangle themselves in his hair, and Shouto wants to just *melt* when Izuku tightens his arms snugly around his waist.

This, Izuku thinks dazedly, is like *nothing* he could have imagined.

He's not even sure what kind of emotion he's feeling. He's not sure if the heartbeat that he can feel pounding away is his or Shouto's. His stomach feels like it's falling several stories, his throat is burning and his hands are itching, he feels like this is all too much and too little at the same time.

This sensation is so overwhelming and unfamiliar that it's almost scary.

He never wants to stop.

It's at that moment when Shouto leans just a bit too far into Izuku, and suddenly they're both toppling over. Their eyes fly open as Izuku hits the back of his head against the floor with an '*oof*'. Shouto catches himself by propping his arms on either side of Izuku's head before he falls on Izuku and squashes him. The fall has been cushioned by the futon, but it's still enough to jolt them out of whatever haze they'd been in.

They're both speechless for a moment, eyes wide and panting as they try to find equilibrium again.

And then Izuku breaks the silence.

"See? This is why a mattress is better."

Shouto bursts out laughing. He lowers his body to rest his head on Izuku's shoulder, tickling Izuku with his warm breath. Izuku lays there on the futon, still half dazed, as he pats Shouto's shaking back.

"You," Shouto snickers, and he sounds like he still hasn't come down from his emotional high, "you're just not fair."

Izuku grins, joyful at just how *easily* Shouto smiles and laughs these days.

Eventually Shotuo rolls off Izuku to lay side-by-side on the futon. He reaches out and sighs in content when Izuku meets him halfway and they hold hands.

"We're gonna have to work on this," Shouto mumbles, but not unhappily.

"Mm," Izuku agrees. "That's alright. We have time."

They do.

*

*

*

—Two years later—

A video with the title “Our Date Got Hijacked by Villains (feat. UA)” is uploaded on Youtube.

The video starts with a shaky vertical camera, as if filmed by phone. A hushed voice whispers into the mic.

“Me and my girlfriend were on a date to this new big sweets shop that opened, and of course it got taken over by villains. But I think those are UA students, babe, over there, you see?”

“Uh-huh,” answers his girlfriend, presumably. “That’s Deku and Sugarman, and... what was the other guy?”

“Can’t Stop Twinkling,” some other fellow customer whisper-shouts to them helpfully.

“Imma get closer, try to hear what they’re planning. They have licenses, so they’re gonna save us, right?”

With that the camera starts inching closer to the trio of students. The three are grouped together, talking to each other in hushed voices as they hide from the villains.

The first voice to filter into the audio is Midoriya’s. The sound is a bit broken and static, as if the editor had to crank up the volume to max.

“—don’t understand how this keeps happening. I go for a jog, and I meet villains at the park. I try to check my savings account, and a bank robbery is attempted. Now I come to eat some sweets and

villains start a shootout?!”

“Well,” Aoyama says, “Todoroki would have only two words for you: villain catnip.”

Midoriya shoots him a *look*.

“*Thanks*, Aoyama.”

The boy winks. “Oui☆”

“Todoroki is totally gonna give you the ‘I told you so’ look when he finds out you ran into villains again without him,” Sato adds helpfully.

“Totally,” Aoyama nods.

“He’ll probably try to cover you in bubble wrap again.”

“Probably.”

Midoriya covers his eyes with a groan.

“I… we’ll cross that bridge when we get there. For now, let’s get out of this situation.”

Midoriya peers over the railing. They’re on the roof of the three-story building while the villains are gathered around the ground floor, blocking the exits and holding them hostage. Midoriya taps a finger to his lips as he considers their options.

And then, he bares his teeth and *grins*.

For some reason, Sato immediately relaxes at Midoriya’s almost vicious expression.

“Oh, okay, everything’s cool now. You know shit’s under control when Midoriya does The Grin.”

“I have a plan,” Midoriya says.

“What is it?”

Midoriya points downwards.

“We jump.”

Sato quickly backpedals. “Nope, I take it back, not cool, not under

control!”

Midoriya explains the plan further, and it seems to be reasonable enough to convince Aoyama. But Sato is still a bit pale. Afraid of hights, maybe?

“C’mon, Sato,” Midoriya coaxes gently. “It’s not that far. Just close your eyes and jump.”

“Easy for you to say,” Sato shoots back, his muscular form trembling just the slightest bit. “You can fly.”

“I *can’t*—technically—fly, you know,” Midoriya corrects. “What I do is just... controlled falling.”

That doesn’t seem to reassure Sato in the slightest as he just shoots the other boy an unimpressed look. Midoriya tilts his head with a “hm,” then tries again.

“Neither of us have wings or flying quirks, so think of it this way. Forget the part where you hit the ground, and just remember this.”

Midoriya *grins*, bright and earnest, brilliant even against the midday sun.

“Falling is the closest we’ll get to flying.”

His voice is light but firm, without a hint of trembling. Sato seems to draw courage from his friend’s encouragement. He draws in a deep breath, then another, and nods.

“Alright. Let’s do this!”

Midoriya nods back.

“Let’s fly.”

On the count of three they all jump, Sato with something between a triumphant roar and a terrified scream, Aoyama with an extravagant twist, and Midoriya with a delighted laugh.

“Can’t! Stop! Twinkling!” Aoyama shouts, and it’s unclear whether he’s making a statement or if he’s just saying his hero name.

“Sato! Now!” Midoriya’s voice trails up, and a boom rocks the building, making the camera shake.

A burst of fire flares into the sky, roaring red against the blue, flaring up like a pair of wings...

...

Comments:

“Falling is the closest we’ll get to flying.”

God I always love Midoriya’s quotes. Do we have a compilation yet?

↳ https://document/analects-of-deku.com You’re welcome.

Can’t believe these kids are already about to graduate!

↳ I know, it feels just like yesterday when they were still class 1a!

↳ does anyone know if midoriya’s gonna do a stint as a sidekick or go straight to pro?

↳ only rumours, though personally I hope that rumour about him maybe teaming up with Shouto as a duo is true (pleasepleasepleaseplease)

↳ i thought Miruko was trying to get him as an intern or sidekick, what happened to that?

↳ Deku bailed the heck outta there cause she tried to make him wear a bunny suit.

↳ doesnt his suit already look like a bunni tho?

↳ a playboy bunny suit.

↳ ...oh.

↳ Hey, at least we always have fanart! https://tumblr.com/playboybunny-deku

↳ oh my GOD what the hell are you people doing with

our pure little cinnamon roll?!! WHy can't the internet love something without breaking it?!!!

▼ Click to see more replies

I'm still just heartbroken that Midoriya's hero name isn't Archangel..

↳ or Seraph

↳or Michael

↳or Guardian Angel

↳or even just Angel

↳i'll even take Phoenix

↳ I always thought Icarus would be a good name too.

↳ohh you're right! well at least its his special move...

"Hey."

Izuku looks up from the comments he was reading to look at Shouto. There's a strange expression on Izuku's face that Shouto can't quite put a finger on, his brows slightly furrowed with a twist of lips that's not quite a smile.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, don't worry," Izuku shakes his head in reassurance. His eyes linger on the last comment.

It feels... strange, to know that there are people who think 'Icarus' would have been a good name for him.

“It’s just, I was thinking... even people who don’t know much about Greek Mythology still know about Icarus. But not many know Daedalus.”

“Daedalus?” Shouto asks, proving Izuku’s point.

“Icarus’ father. The one who made those wings in the first place.”

Izuku has a faraway look in his eyes.

“I wonder what Daedalus would think if he knew it wasn’t him but his son whose name went down in history.”

Izuku used to dream about Icarus.

He still dreams about Icarus.

He dreams of a boy whose father forcefully strapped wings of feathers and wax to his back. He dreams of a boy who desperately tries to reach the sun. He dreams of falling from the sky with burning wings.

And in these dreams his father (Daedalus? Hisashi?) only laughs as he watches him (Icarus) (no, Izuku) fall, cruel delight dripping from his lips like venomous flames.

“It’s as I’ve always said, boy. You belong down here, with me.

“Like father, like son.”

But the thing is, it goes both ways in the myth. Hisashi had laughed in delight when he saw Izuku had fire too, revelling in the manifestation of his power in his son, claiming they were alike. But you see, Icarus wasn’t supposed to fly too high *or* too low.

Izuku swore he would never be like his father, and Icarus never even cared about flying low. They both just wanted to reach the sun.

Even if they burn their wings.

Some dreams are too bright to be held back by mere feathers and wax.

So Izuku will leap to the sky to prove it— not just to his father, not just to his mother, not just to every doubter or even just for himself, but for all the others who will also doubt themselves. For all the children whose dreams will be ridiculed. For every Icarus out there.

He'll prove it to them and prove it for them. He'll prove that even if you don't have the perfect quirk, even if life has dealt you a cruel hand, even if you have wings of fragile feathers and weeping wax, you can still reach the sun.

He'll prove to the world that *you can be a hero.*

They say the tale of Icarus is about hubris. About complacency and arrogance. But no, Izuku thinks. Icarus knew full well what would happen, and chose to do it anyway. Because there are some things in life you just can't give up. Because there are some things in life worth burning your wings for.

Icarus is a tale of conviction.

It's a tale of me, of you, of everyone who won't give up on their dreams no matter what the world tells them. And maybe they're right. Maybe you can't reach the sun. But that doesn't mean Izuku won't burn his wings trying.

And it doesn't mean it won't be worth it.

Chapter End Notes

> Inko will totally adopt Eri properly/officially in the near future, making her Midoriya Eri. Eri will start calling Inko "Mom" soon. This is the reason Hisashi was never a Midoriya in my AU. Because someday Shouto will marry Izuku and become Midoriya Shouto, Inko will win in court and officially adopt Eri to become Midoriya Eri, and that's my BYW canon Midoriya family: Inko, Izuku, Shouto, and Eri.

I know we're at the end, but I'm still getting a lot of comments/ questions about the "pull" side of Izuku's quirk, so hopefully this clears things up:
Think of Izuku's "pull" as an invisible grappling gun. There has to be 1) something physical, 2) within a reasonable distance, 3) that Izuku can see. If these conditions are met then the "hook" or "anchor" can grab purchase and let Izuku pull. Which means that no, Izuku can't pull someone's heart out (won't, but also can't) and no, Izuku can't yeet himself into the sky by pulling the sun. It don't work that way.

That said, I'll come back with the Epilogue at the end of the year. It's been almost three years since we first embarked on this journey together. We've had some highs and lows during that time, with months of hiatus and life throwing us curveballs, but all your lovely comments, art, and support have made it *worth it*.
I hope this work has made you feel at least a fraction of how happy you made me.
Thank you.
See you soon at the end of the journey.

IZUKU HEADBANG

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you for your art/work.
A poem “For every Icarus out there” by Foe-Nyx (Phoenixcatch7):
https://archiveofourown.org/works/27822913
Izuku with bunny ears by deku-supremacy:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/637273701271896065

Additional fanart:

Izuku's fire halo turning into wings by apassingwolf:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/641459707761000448
Surprised!Izuku by yes-im-a-drawer:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/643257678816231424
Izuku man-bun by sketphire:
https://crowbird-kamakse.tumblr.com/post/644532172574932992

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aizawa stands at the front of the classroom and addresses his current class of first-year students with his sleeping bag at ready.

“As is custom, the Seniors known as the Big Three will explain the internship program. Come on in.”

It’s a simple introduction. Bare and minimum, to the point, efficient; just as the hero likes it. And perhaps these students don’t know him well enough yet, but the three students waiting to come in *do* know him well enough to recognize the subtle pride in the hero’s voice. Coming from Aizawa, it means more than any number of flowery words. So when they walk inside the classroom, their backs are straight and their heads are held high.

Bakugo Katsuki, Todoroki Shouto, and Midoriya Izuku step inside.

Whispers break out among the first years. The members of this years Big Three have been famous for various reasons ever since they themselves were freshmen, and seeing them as their seniors is something else.

But then Bakugo Katsuki sweeps a glowering look over them and all but growls at them.

“What the fuck are you idiots staring at?”

And with that, the moment of star-gazing awe is shattered as the first years sort of gape at his crassness. Todoroki looks completely unphased while Midoriya drops his face into his palms with a groan.

“*Kacchan,*” he stresses, and there’s an incredibly long-suffering yet resigned note in his exasperated voice. “Can’t you even *pretend* to try?”

But Bakugo only scoffs and rolls his eyes.

“Why the fuck would I do that?”

“We’re here to explain about the internship. It’s our *job* to try.”

“It ain't my fault these extras know shit all!”

They continue bickering, though noticeably without any heat, almost as if it’s routine more than anything. Todoroki just stands quietly beside them, completely unphased, as if this is common occurrence. The freshmen are utterly bewildered by their weird dynamics and look to Aizawa for help but he’s already zipped himself inside his sleeping bag.

Eventually Midoriya tries to salvage the situation by getting around to introductions. Bakugo is uncaring and uncooperative. Todoroki only says “Todoroki Shouto” as if there’s anyone in this room that doesn’t already know that and stares back at them with a completely unreadable face. Midoriya groans again.

“Every time. Every time we’re called together, it’s always me who has to clean up this mess. Why must you both be so antisocial?”

He sighs, then steps forward.

“So, um. Hi?”

And with that, at last, this info session approaches something closer to what the students were expecting.

Midoriya isn’t smooth or flamboyant, but he’s earnest and genuinely endearing. The students find themselves drawn in, freely engaging with questions, and even Bakugo and Todoroki chip in from time to

time. The end of the class finds them in a much better atmosphere than when it began.

“Alright, I’d chalk this up as a success. We’ll take a few general questions and wrap this up, shall we?”

Several questions are asked before one student raises their hand and asks:

“What do you each think is the most important thing to keep in mind as a hero?”

Bakugo gives the questioner a *look*.

“Winning.”

Midoriya’s face falls into his palm so hard that it makes a small *smack*. Todoroki pats his shoulder.

Todoroki answers next. He taps a finger against his chin and hums before replying softly.

“It’s not about being *the* best. Do *your* best, and be *your* best.”

Midoriya lifts his head and smiles, like he knows something more, like this is some inside thing between them.

And last but not least, Midoriya. He hesitates for a moment. The smile that was previously constant on his face wanes and fades before he opens his mouth.

“Life isn’t fair. And it certainly isn’t kind.”

The first years are taken back by how hard his voice and expression has become in a brief instant. But soon his tone softens, his lips curve, and his eyes brighten again.

“Which is why *we must be*,” he continues.

Midoriya Izuku sweeps a look across the classroom, looking each student in the eye.

“We must be fair, and we must be kind, to make up for a life that isn’t. Then maybe someday... we can make a better world. That’s what heroes do.”

* * *

Life isn't fair, and it certainly isn't kind.

Which is why *we must be.*

We must be fair, and we must be kind, to make up for a life that isn't.

Then maybe someday... we can make a better world.

That's what heroes do.

You can be one too.

— Sincerely, Burn Your Wings

Chapter End Notes

> Throughout my time with BYW, you, my dear readers, have been so good and kind to me. Your comments, art, support, and love were what kept me going. When I felt down I'd re-read all your comments and magically feel better about myself and life in general.
> In other words, you were my hero.
> Thank you.
>
> This one's for you. For everyone in the Izuku Headbang Gang:
>
> *IZUKU HEADBANG*

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!